

The construction of expert knowledge in Popular  
Management Literature

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## Abstract

This thesis is a critically-oriented study of how knowledge and authority are legitimated in the discursive structure of popular management books. Some key textual and contextual properties of these texts are investigated in a corpus of over a hundred texts, representing a selection of highly influential works in this field according to *emic* criteria.

Five empirical studies assess different aspects of their structure, with a special attention to their rôle in the construction of authorial and reader personas: the nature of management book titles, that sets the pragmatic key for the understanding of these texts; the use of metadiscourse to set and answer genre expectations, shedding light on the reciprocal expectations of authors and readers; exemplification patterns, showing how persuasive texts can be deployed without developing general arguments; the use of narratives of personal experience to establish authorial credibility; and the strategic deployment of presuppositions to mobilize readers' affects and convictions in highly-charged topics. The purpose of these studies is to provide a discursively-based account of the typical persuasive devices used by writers in popular management, illuminating the epistemic characteristics of the discipline.

The analyses show the highly idiosyncratic character of popular management writing, that cannot be assimilated either to academic criteria nor to popularisation genres. The positioning of writers regarding their texts, their themes and their audience is understood as an expression of their position within the field of management, where several interests and sets of practitioners coincide. Its relation to the well-established ideological character of the discipline is discussed, as is the value of textually-oriented discourse analysis for the critique of such ideologies.

*NCL, in memoriam*

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction

This study is an examination of the language and rhetoric used to legitimate claims to knowledge in popular management books. Through a series of empirical studies, we explore how an authoritative authorial position is accomplished through written interaction in this genre and discipline. We take a view of discourse as text in context, deployed by writers with specific social identities and addressed to equally specific audiences in order to achieve well-defined social goals. Thus, our reading of this texts is discursive in that it seeks to illuminate how its linguistic properties are shaped by the features of the social interaction carried out through it, and the social system in which it is embedded.

Of the multiple meanings of “discourse”, this is perhaps the one that has been least attended to in research on management writing. Many authors in the past decade have shown interest in management discourse in its broadest meaning, what it sometimes called a “capital-D discourse” (Gee, 1992): a system of thought that comprises attitudes, beliefs and practical habits. Less effort has been expended in researching how this system of thought is embodied in concrete semiotic practices, giving rise to conventionalised semiotic resources (“lowercase-D discourses”). Our interest in the present study is directed to the

latter: the recognisable discursive spaces constructed through repeated interaction, and the rhetorical expectations they foster in readers. We look at language not as a vehicle for communicating independently-existing conceptions of nature, nor as an all-powerful force subjecting readers to its hegemonic structure, but rather as an intrinsically social phenomenon, designed to solicit assent by complex means— cajoling, persuading and drawing in readers through a range of interpersonal and argumentative strategies. We focus on pragmatic, functional and cognitive elements, seeking to situate these discursive patterns within the broader context of labour, research, power and discourse change.

The idea for this study grew from a desire to explain how ideologies and canonic models for thought (capital-D discourses) become hegemonic and suffuse our views on social life. Contemporary social research has shown the oversimplification in the Marxian dictum that “the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas” (Marx and Engels, 1845, 64). More nuanced explanations are required to explain how ideological dominance is achieved in contemporary societies, where multiple cleavages intersect in highly variable patterns. It is hardly audacious, however, to claim that pro-market ideologies are nowadays hegemonic. Bourdieu and Wacquant (2001, 1) speak of a “new planetary vulgate”, neoliberal in character, taking hold of the global world and spread through political, economic and management discourse. In their view, the rhetoric of globalisation naturalises the cognitive schemata of conservative thought, and dresses the “social fantasies of the dominant” in the trappings of science and reason. Together with politics and media discourse, management training texts are regarded as one of the main avenues for the diffusion of these schemata.

Unfortunately, this engaging and intuitively persuasive idea received little empirical content. Even chronological criteria hint at a relation between writing on management for a broad, unspecialised audience—which experienced a tremendous boost in the 1980s—and the hardening of market ideologies in disorganised capitalism (Lash and Urry, 1987). The importance of discourse in

these changes has been widely acknowledged. Fairclough (2000b, 147) claims:

Language is an important part of the new order. First, because imposing the new order centrally involves the reflexive process of imposing new representations of the world, new discourses; second, because new ways of using language —new genres— are an important part of the new order. So the project of the new order is partly a language project. Correspondingly, the struggle against the new order is partly a struggle over language.

Although the political aspects of this order have been relatively well studied (e.g., by Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999; Collins, 2001c; Hodge and Coronado, 2006; Lessa, 2006; Vaara et al., 2006), but explorations of its expressions in managerial thought have been less precise. For the most part, the rôle of management discourse has remained underanalysed, as theoretically hazy as the phenomena it seeks to describe.

Our goal is not to establish whether managerial thought is indeed a vector of diffusion of capitalist ideology, or whether such an ideology is undesirable. The claim that management has “propagat[ed] ideologically inspired amoral theories” (Ghoshal, 2005, 76) has been sufficiently proved by a multitude of content studies, and we take for granted that “the social injustice and environmental destructiveness of the broader social and economic systems” (Adler et al., 2007, 120) fostered by these ideologies requires a radical correction at the broadest level of social organisation. Rather, we are concerned with the strategic uses of management discourse, or how it “figures in the development, promotion and dissemination of the strategies for social change of particular groups of social agents, and in hegemonic struggle between strategies, and in the implementation of successful strategies” (Fairclough, 2003b). We seek to identify exactly how inequality and domination are legitimated in management doctrine. The examination of the rhetorical choices of popular authors is intended to elucidate how they help establish preferred practices and common beliefs through

semiotic regularities and repetitions, therefore constructing normative rôles for themselves and for their readers. Popular management writing evokes institutional patterns in its structure, and helps in turn to strengthen these structures in a dialectic manner.

The genre of popular management books is almost unexplored in its discursive properties. This study aims to offer an initial image of its specific procedures for legitimation and authority-construction through close attention to specific features in a large corpus of over one hundred book-length texts selected by practitioners themselves as a representation of the best in the discipline. Both the corpus and the approaches are deliberately broad, seeking to provide a first approach to this form of writing that may serve as a basis for further, more focused research.

### **1.1.1 Subject of this study**

Defining popular management literature, or even management literature as a whole, is not a trivial matter. As a relatively new discipline, and one firmly located at the “softer” end of the scientific spectrum, management cannot claim to have well-defined boundaries for its research programmes and its professional practice. The term is applied with varying degrees of strictness. Sometimes it covers the many fields of knowledge applied to the efficient functioning of the contemporary corporation: finance, marketing, organisation theory, applied microeconomics, etc. In other cases, it is more restrictively defined, designating only the tasks of planning and control carried out by specialised experts in complex organisations.

The fluidity of these boundaries is hardly casual. Management as an identifiable profession has experienced several major shifts in global orientation over the scarce hundred years of its recorded history, and its limits have metamorphosed accordingly. Conflicting definitions represent competing programmes for the yet unstable disciplinary scope. But moreover, the breadth with which management is often conceived has ideological significance. As part of the mod-

ern restructuring of labour and everyday life, an ambitious project to conceive them in the imagery and vocabulary of management has taken hold (Fournier and Munro, 2005, 7).

Setting strict thematic criteria for identifying management texts seems thus untenable, as subjects are incorporated to the discipline or shed from it according to temporally- and ideologically-variable criteria. It is no less evident, however, that the prototypical topic of management is business administration. Its core subjects cluster around the design and implementation of business processes, and are oriented to the efficient and profitable operation of a company. Management books are rarely descriptive or analytic in nature. Rather, they are concerned with providing blueprints and recipes for the challenges involved in running a business. Thus, management books adopt implicitly but invariably a perspective from the top of a corporate ladder. It is this orientation, rather than any specific topic or theoretical paradigm, that gives them their characteristic form of rationality (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996).

With the academic institutionalisation of management knowledge, some of it circulates in genres and media very close to those of the human and social sciences: scholarly journals on management topics, textbooks reflecting the syllabi of influential schools, handbooks and other learned volumes where this practical orientation is joined to partly autonomous disciplinary concerns. These texts, however, often sit uncomfortably with the interests and outlooks of practitioners. While early analyses of business education in the United States —doubtlessly the trend-setter at a global level— underscored the lack of a scientific foundation (Gordon and Howell, 1959; Pierson, 1959), more recent voices have claimed that the allegedly scientific production of business academia is useless or positively harmful for business practice. In a sobering critique of business scholarship, Pfeffer and Fong (2002) argued that academic research exerts little influence, if any, over actual managerial practices.

What we call —for lack of a better name— *popular* management literature are practitioner-oriented texts that seek to position themselves in the niche left



by this rift. They provide advice in management technique at all levels, from personal effectiveness to organisational strategy. Although sometimes overlapping in orientation and content with scholarly books, they are not simply vulgarised versions of them. The theories and models popular texts offer are not a popularisation of academic research, although they may eventually be adopted in business teaching (Lindvall, 1998) and certainly influence its curriculum and outlook (Collins, 2000, 20). In fact, authors of popular business books are business consultants and successful managers as often as academics, the three types of gurus that Huczynski (1993) identifies as driving this genre.

Boltanski and Chiappello (1999) characterise these books by their intended audience: corporate cadres that seek information on the latest advances in management technique. While this is doubtlessly a central aspect of their use, it seems to have become less so than in previous decades. Management may have never been too specialised a skill, but recent trends point to its deployment as a notion to conceive an ever widening range of domains. Not only has the work of professional managers become increasingly dispersed and fragmented (Hales, 1993), but furthermore all forms of labour are increasingly often conceived as a management of various forms of capital. Thus, for example, educational institutions are increasingly expected to adopt a business model in establishing their priorities and evaluating performance (Fairclough, 1993), and health services follow along the same footsteps (Hacker and Marmor, 1999). Politics are increasingly tied to managerial criteria (Clarke and Newman, 1997; Hodge and Coronado, 2006). Private life, in turn, —family, career and even bodily image— is often presented in almost economic terms, as a set of resources from which optimal results should be extracted by careful husbandry and planning (Deetz, 1992; Hochschild, 2003; Sotirin et al., 2007). Several books have followed, for example, on the wake of Covey (1990), applying the “7 habits” he identifies in effective career practices to family relations, weight loss techniques and even teenage socialisation.

This hints at the rich ideological content of these books. Intended to provide

recipes for success in business, they do not question the foundations on which the economic system is built. Instead, they apply them as a generic pattern for all forms of social life. Through this framing, management literature turns the kind of practical knowledge needed to successfully perform under contemporary capitalism into a blueprint for social action *tout court*.

### 1.1.2 Importance of this study

It is not simply intellectual curiosity that encourages exploration of the process of formation of management knowledge. This kind of practical discourse has obvious effect on the epistemic structure of the managerial profession, and on broader workplace issues. Under the influence of contemporary management doctrine, the organisation of labour has experienced tremendous shifts over the past thirty years. Not only the individual trajectory and identity of millions of workers across the globe, but also the social involvement and appraisal of these changing practices has adjusted to fit managerial prescriptions. Management discourse has thus increasingly become a key resource in the legitimation of political and social regimes (Clarke and Newman, 1993). The principles of managerial practice —centred on the fostering of competition, efficiency, tight control on the results of work and a specific form of rationality closely associated with capitalist practice— are an increasingly prominent part of globally shared ideals of social structure (Chiapello and Fairclough, 2002; Fernández Rodríguez, 2005).

In more general terms, management knowledge has proved to exert a great influence on social *ideologies* (van Dijk, 1998). The processes by which belief is socially justified, certified and processed as to become knowledge concern not only the epistemologist or the discourse analyst, but also every actor engaged in the social milieu. Within the managerial field, popular management literature occupies a demonstrably central rôle. Not only is it more tightly coupled with practitioners' decisions and interest —shaping their notions of disciplinary fitness and setting standards for communication, evaluation and legitimation

of models for action (Eccles and Nohria, 1992)—, but also it has been shown to more agilely track variations and innovations in management practice than formally reviewed academic outlets (Svejenova and Álvarez, 1999).

Indeed, popular texts may be setting the note that management academia follows. While Mazza and Álvarez (2000) describe the relation between academic venues and popular ones as equivalent to the one between *haute couture* and off-the-rack clothing —one being ready-made and easily applicable, if not always well-fitting, while the more sophisticated product ensures a higher quality by costlier procedures—, the metaphor and its fashion overtones do not account in an entirely adequate manner for the properties of these publications. It isn't the expensive, carefully developed academic products that set trends in management, but rather books of a popular persuasion. Collins (2000, 20) suggests that formal management education dances to the tune set by popular theorists. Kieser (1997, 49) notes that “the best accelerator of a management fashion is a management bestseller”, and indeed most academic research lags considerably behind popular discourse, reviewing (and often critically dismissing) methods and designs only once they have achieved a high level of visibility. Lewis et al. (2006) point out parallels in popular management advice and academic research, but they acknowledge that authors of the former do not seem to be familiar with research literature of any kind. They suggest that coincidences in subject may be casual or, more likely, the result of convergent formulation of ideologically basic principles.

Furthermore, popular texts have become entrenched even in formal management training. Micklethwait and Wooldridge (1997) claim that academics show little care or respect for popular writing, but surveys of the reading habits of business school students include popular texts in an even higher proportion than scholarly ones (Álvarez and Mazza, 2000, 27). This decoupling is also perceptible in the rôle academia plays in the training of practitioners. Even from their inception, business schools set themselves apart from what perceived as an undesirable encroaching of technical disciplines over the basically genteel standard

they wished to imbue managers of (Sass, 1985, 204). They laid emphasis not on devising general, abstract rules, but on developing the creative skills to face unforeseen situations, employing casework as a basis (Gragg, 1940). The model has been extraordinarily successful, and MBAs have become an established form of training in business all over the world (Zhao et al., 2006). However, hypothetical exposure to cases in business school quickly proved inferior to actual practice in consultancy, and international consulting firms quickly became an important factor in the evolution and transmission of management knowledge (Armbrüster and Kipping, 2001; Barley and Kunda, 1992; Guillén, 1994; Havelock and Guskin, 1971). Mintzberg (1996) compared them to “graduate graduate schools”, setting the lead for practice that academic establishments fail to provide (Engwall et al., 2001, 59ff.). Many of the most successful authors in popular management literature have an extensive background in the consulting field, thus further blurring the distinction between the ready-made and *haute couture*.

Some researchers have linked this growing importance of popular sources for management knowledge with a more general shift in the processes of knowledge creation at a societal level. The notion of a “knowledge society” has been touted in many fields of social science with growing insistence during the last quarter of the past century since its initial formulation by Bell (1976), and has been enthusiastically and glibly adopted in the fields of politics, economics and management. A large number of recent theories in the managerial field are explicitly concerned with the management of information and knowledge, held to be the main asset of companies in post-industrial society (e.g., Conner and Prahalad, 1996; Davenport and Prusak, 1998). While many of these have focused on knowledge that is informally created and transmitted, yet crucial to the successful performance of tasks (Alvesson, 1993; Starbuck, 1992), the question remains of how this redefinition of rôles in knowledge creation affect social trends in a wider scale.

Riesman (1998) has suggested that the increased influence of popular man-

agement knowledge is in part due to the colonisation of educational institutions and basic scientific production by consumerist values, a process characterised by Fairclough (1993) as “marketisation”. Formal, academic knowledge is progressively delegitimised as impractical and inefficient, opening the way for other sources of belief to produce knowledge independently. As a paradoxical result of the once revolutionary post-modern critique of scientific knowledge—which sought to subject to critical scrutiny the conservative, traditional values of the academic establishment—has been to devalue to rôle scientific criticism plays in the *inter pares* collective justification of belief. Alternate sources of knowledge include the successful entrepreneurs and consulting gurus that make up a good part of the numbers of popular management literature (Mazza and Álvarez, 2000).

Success in practical fields is thus adduced as a legitimating factor in the establishment of management practitioners and authors as experts (Brint, 1994; Giddens, 1990). Constant exposure to the principles of managerial organisation, as they are embedded in workplace practices, helps set these ideas as ingrained assumptions about the world, the kind of ideological statements most often carried by popular management literature (Mazza and Álvarez, 2000). Even beyond specifically economic topics, entrepreneurs and managerial experts exert a major influence, and reasoning modelled on the spirit of capitalist enterprise has progressively become a central feature of contemporary discourse on social issues (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1999; Fuat Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). The success of these forms of conceiving social life has been extensive, and has consequently driven an enormous expansion (Brownlie and Saren, 1997).

The public appeal of this discourse is evident from quantitative evidence regarding publications. Álvarez et al. (1999) provide conclusive evidence of stupendous growth in both periodicals and books dealing with managerial matters in Europe, and Collins (2000) quotes the number of popular books on management published each year in the United Kingdom alone above 5000 titles. Micklethwait and Wooldridge (1997) estimate the market for business books in

1996 at about \$750 million, and Bogart (2003) updated it to \$938.3 million for the United States alone. The pervading presence of this discourse has fostered the introduction of managerial culture as a staple in every social field. Features such as commodification, marketisation, competition or capital accumulation, and the associated entrepreneurial values, have become omnipresent. Even if it does not remain invariant in its passage through the various contexts in which it is used and deployed, there can be little doubt that managerial discourse constitutes a fundamental part of the “neoliberal vulgate” (Bourdieu, 1998a) dominating contemporary argument on social and economic matters. As one of the few overt sources of ideology after the alleged “end of ideologies” (Fukuyama, 1989), management literature offers a privileged window on the construction of social beliefs.

### 1.1.3 Contribution of this study

As we stated at the beginning of this introduction, little discourse-analytic work exists on popular management writing, and what research has been carried out has been either programmatic or fragmentary. Boltanski and Chiappello (1999) explored a comprehensive corpus of management texts in French, both original and translated, comparing the key themes tackled in classical works from the mid 20th century with more contemporary ones. This important study was limited, however, to explicit content, and did not address pragmatic, intertextual, generic or stylistic features. Later research by Chiappello and Fairclough (2002) and Fairclough (2003b) took up these themes in more linguistically-informed fashion, but was greatly limited in scope, dealing only with fragments from a single text. It is difficult to extrapolate trends and generic patterns from its admittedly suggestive results.

In turn, works by organisational theorists have explored capital-D discourses with only cursory regard for their semiotic realisation. Thus, Collins (2000, 10) seeks to engage the “grammar” of guru management texts, but his largely metaphoric use of the term does not entail actual linguistic or stylistic precisions.

In the worst, and not entirely infrequent case, they have focused on language only as a deviation from the objectivist ideal of impersonal communication. As yet, there is no systematic study that providing textually-oriented analyses of the ideological and strategic effects of popular management writing, relating communicative purposes to specific discourse structures.

This thesis attempts to reduce this gap. It seeks to deal with a comprehensive sample of texts, in order to see how social routines for action coalesce into repeated patterns of communication. The approach taken in this study is to work on a large scale, taking broad sweeps by comparing general features in a number of texts. Of course, limiting oneself to this kind of analysis would preclude any form of in-depth discussion and force us to a quantitative form of register study, unsuited to the functional concerns that motivate us. Thus, broad explorations are matched with closer readings of selected stretches of text, seeking to use the quantitative results as waymarks towards significant patterns invisible to the naked eye.

On a broader sense, we seek to advance a fuller understanding of the rôle of language in the process of establishing and legitimating social beliefs. Many researchers in organisation studies have enthusiastically embraced the notion that organising and managing are chiefly —or even solely— linguistic activities (e.g. Boje, 1991; Czarniawska, 1999; Grant et al., 2004). However, discussion of this discursive meaning-making often focuses on cognitive, psychodynamic and social aspects to the exclusion of the linguistic substance in which they are enacted. We doubt that this imbalance is helpful in determining what is it about text and talk that makes it suitable for articulating knowledge and emotion. As the discussion, if tackled at all, remains at a very high level of abstraction, there is no common ground in which to discuss the objections to objectivist readings that adhere to an idealised view of “good” language as a transparent wrapping for pre-existing thoughts. With unfortunate frequency, a focus on language is associated exclusively with post-modern forms of social life, and with post-structuralist approaches to knowledge and power. By looking at rhetoric and

discursive issues as integral to all forms of meaning-making, whether narrative or not, we seek to show that language plays a key rôle in the fixation, diffusion and adoption of knowledge, no matter what political or epistemological conception a specific utterer embraces. Our aim is to help dispel the pejorative conception of language that considers it as an encumbrance in the process of communication.

Beyond specifically academic concerns, the thesis is intended as a contribution to a strategic critique (Fairclough, 2003b; Jessop, 2000) of the pervasive strengthening of capitalist relations of domination. Managerial texts and talk are an important vector of the legitimation that capitalism requires to ensure the acquiescence from society as a whole (Alvesson, 1987, 170; Anthony, 1977; Boltanski and Chiappello, 1999, 28) in the face of its intrinsic absurdities. As the classical analysts of the capitalist organisation of society noted, it is an irrational system where neither workers nor owners can ever hope for a fulfilling existence (Marx, 1867; Weber, 1897, 31). To enforce compliance from labourers at all levels of the corporate ladder, contemporary disorganised capitalism exhorts them to see the organisation's goals as their own and invest their own emotional satisfaction in successfully playing the market game. By challenging the naturalisation of these values, and exposing the conditions of their production, we hope to provide an impetus to its opponents in the continuing struggle for social change.

#### 1.1.4 Overview of this study

The present thesis is by publication. While it was conceived from the beginning as an integrated project, and the chapters it comprises constitute elements of a connected whole, each of its empirical studies was designed to be an independently understandable and legible item of research. They have been submitted for publication in peer-reviewed journals, and some of them have recently been published. The present introductory chapter and the final discussion are intended to provide a global overview of its overall aims and significance.

The remainder of this chapter is divided into three sections. The first in-



troduces the notion of popular management literature, examining the relevant research in several disciplines. The review of approaches points to the necessity of providing a textually- and contextually-oriented linguistic characterisation of this writing, in order to offset the exclusively philosophical focus of most previous analyses of management discourse, as well as challenge the pejorative view of language still prevalent in objectivist outlooks. The chapter continues with a summary presentation of the version of critical discourse analysis employed in the thesis, laying out its main theoretical points. In the last section, we describe the principles and procedures for selecting the corpus of texts established for this study.

Chapter 2 begins the empirical section of the thesis with an exploration of titles as a window onto the discursive practices of management authors. Although conventional wisdom in composition presents titles as a summary representation of the entire text, their rhetorical purpose and design can be much more complex: titles do not only summarise, but also seek to pitch the accompanying text as a useful and attractive read. In so doing, they reveal the conventions for usefulness and importance that govern the discursive community where they circulate. Our examination seeks to provide insight on the intent of popular management texts, and on the kind of relation that authors seek to establish with their readership. A detailed model for a functional analysis of titles is devised to examine the rhetorical situation thus created.

Chapter 3 is concerned with the analysis of metadiscourse, the set of cues in the textual surface that authors deploy to explicitly intervene in the interpretation of the text and establish an interpersonal relation with readers. It takes previous studies of academic discourse as a point of reference for exploring how a common understanding of the situation of communication is negotiated in popular management texts, in order to highlight the routine social and epistemological practices that give management knowledge its specific flavour.

Chapter 4 explores the use of narratives of personal experience as a means for constructing an authorial persona in popular management texts. Narratives

have been one of the most widely explored features of organisational discourse, serving to transmit knowledge, foster cohesion and discipline listeners to community standards. We explore an extended example to show how transactional and social goals are jointly performed, skilfully integrating a persuasive portrait of the author's expertise with the description of events and their narrative organisation.

Chapter 5 focuses on the rhetorical and cognitive effect of the use of concrete examples. The patterns of exemplification, illustration and exemplary injunction are examined as a source of insight on the standards for proof and knowledge formation that operate in the diffusion and legitimation of management knowledge. We argue that a nuanced analysis of examples should go beyond questions of logical validity to explore the selective framing of the rhetorical and epistemological conventions that establish relevance. The choice of this strategy for textual development is seen to derive from the patterns of knowledge construction and transmission in management practice, where common assumptions about the world are used to evoke a disciplinary frame even in the absence of actual theory formation.

Chapter 6 explores the use of presuppositions in popular management texts on leadership. The appeal to presupposed beliefs, assumed to be shared by all participants in a given situation of communication, is examined to reveal its rôle in accomplishing the persuasive goals of the text, as presupposition is ideally suited to the communication of largely unarticulated, broad models about the social world. We argue that this use of presupposition is central to the success of popular managerial writing, which is concerned with the deontic projection of desirable practices. A systematic expansion of presuppositions allows us to show the kind of unstated arguments that fuel managerial practice and beliefs.

Chapter 7 brings the analyses together, offering a broad look at popular management writing as a genre and to the issues of power emanating from this exploration. It discusses the significance of our global findings and recounts the problems encountered, showing the way for further research that would enable

a precise formulation of generic characteristics and discipline-specific patterns for establishing, challenging and diffusing management knowledge.

## **1.2 Towards a notion of popular management literature**

Although a growing body of literature bears witness to the interest on management as a field of knowledge and discourse, a clear-cut definition of what exactly lies within this field is yet to come. Management is a relative newcomer, both as a profession and an academic speciality, and its limits are largely imprecise yet. Furthermore, it has undergone major transformations in the course of its short existence. Coupled with the phenomenal expansion that business and management topics have experienced in the popular press, this situation makes finding an accurate and comprehensive definition a daunting task.

In defining a discipline, several different criteria may obtain. Some are characterised by the object of their study; sociology, for example, employ various methods, but is unified by the goal of analysing patterns of human interaction in complex groups. Other disciplines gather around a method, such as history, which can be applied to almost any conceivable object as long as the requisite processes for documenting past events are observed. Yet others derive their identity from a consolidated tradition in the organisation of studies that ensures a continuing identity for practitioners despite differences in both object and method. Anthropology is one such case, bringing together the very different practices of archaeologists, biological anthropologists and cultural anthropologists under a single label.

It is unclear which of these criteria can define management— or even if any of them does. In a review of European management publishing, Álvarez et al. (1999, 9) candidly recognise that any definition of the topics of management is discretionary and subjective, as the discipline encompasses different and even incompatible approaches. They resort to an extensional definition, comprising

“categories such as organization, human resources, production, finance, marketing, social sciences applied to management, business economics, and so forth”. Other researchers share their perplexities, and attempts at a systematic conceptual definition are rare in the field. Johanne Pettersen et al. (2002) argue that management research is invariably multidisciplinary. However, they only hint at what brings these disciplines together. (Kipping and Amorim, 2002, 137) note that, unlike other business-related disciplines like accounting and corporate law, there is no solidly defined body of knowledge that management can call its own.

Neither do practical concerns adequately circumscribe the concept. Ideas on what exactly is the task of managers have changed markedly throughout the past century (Collins, 2000, 65ff), as we will see in the next section. Many of the functions essential to business administration, such as accounting and marketing, are as often counted within management as not. This depends on whether the discipline is seen as a “narrowly defined technical skill” or rather “a well-rounded, general purpose intelligence” for business purposes (Sass, 1985, 201). In a classic summary, Mintzberg (1975) ascribes ten different roles to managerial work, none of them having to do with specialist skills: on an interpersonal level, managers perform a symbolic duty as head of an organisation; they lead subordinates, establishing a work atmosphere and a motivation for action; and they liaise with contacts outside the organisation. On an informational level, managers monitor all information relevant to the handling of the organisation; they disseminate it to those who need it; and act as spokesmen (sic) towards the outside world. Finally, on a decisional level, they play an entrepreneurial rôle, initiating adaptive change; they handle disturbances in the workflow; they allocate the resources of the organisation to the different tasks; and they negotiate differences with other organisations and individuals.

Finding a disciplinary closure for these practices is a daunting task, not least because competing definitions represent competing conceptions at work in this diffuse field.

In this work we remain largely agnostic regarding this competition. As we

shall see later in section 1.4 regarding the criteria for selecting our corpus, we have let the boundaries of the field be traced by insider notions of what lies within. However, a global notion of its contents is essential to any attempt at understanding how this community constructs, evaluates and negotiates the knowledge contained in its written communication. In the following sections, we seek to provide a descriptive account of management practice and literature to guide this effort. First, we summarise the main stages in the evolution of managerial practice and theory. Then, we review the history and nature of management publications, before finally turning to a discussion of what is known about popular management texts in particular.

### **1.2.1 A brief history of managerial practice and theory**

The radically modern character of management as a profession and a field of knowledge cannot be overemphasised (Child, 1981, 33). While some historians of the discipline like to find antecedents throughout history (e.g., Pindur et al., 1995, 59), managerial work was first shaped as a career path during the Second Industrial Revolution. The administration of business up to that moment had been almost exclusively a concern of owners themselves. Electrification and the invention of machine tools—which allowed unprecedented growth in production potential and factory size—and the professionalisation of technological development—which first became separate from routine engineering—greatly influenced the need for specialist handling of shop-floor processes and capital utilisation (Bernal, 1953; Hobsbawm, 1999).

Much like scientific research shifted from a largely individual enterprise to the emerging research universities due to the growing sophistication and price of the required materials, production and commerce became incorporated in the great companies that could benefit from economies of scale and command the resources demanded by capital-intensive industry. Chandler (1977) famously described this process as the emergence of a *visible hand* that guided the economic fortunes of industrialised countries. Spurred by this growth and in close cooper-

ation with the burgeoning academic system, entrepreneurs devised and funded a system of business schools where the skills necessary to manage it would be taught (Sass, 1985, 200). This also means that management has been intimately tied with the developments in the capitalist system. Although countries under planned economic systems developed their own, now largely forgotten (but see Berliner, 1957; Liuhto, 1999; Milner et al., 1986), managerial doctrines, the main thrust of the discipline has accompanied the development of the modern industrial system and the privately-owned, large-scale corporation. In Europe the process was state-backed to a significant extent, especially in Germany. The lack of a comparable framework in America meant that this development would be exclusively carried out by private companies.

As the character of capitalism changed, so did management practice. Management historian Daniel Wren (1979, 5) points out that management is always carried out in a given social milieu, whose institutions and norms strongly influence professional practice. It is customary to distinguish several points of inflection that markedly affected the development of management. The first of them was the emergence of the industrial corporation and the scientific management theory associated with it, which replaced a previous *laissez-faire* ideology emphasising personal effort and commitment (Schmitz, 1995, 63). Inspired by engineering and focusing on production processes and personnel control, this was the first major wave of management practice. With the enormous growth of these corporations in the interwar period and the adoption of multidivisional structures, coordination and strategic problems came to the fore, leading to a radically different kind of management (Chandler, 1990). The influence of the Human Relations Movement also altered much of the Taylorist principles of scientific management, foregrounding the importance of social issues within the shopfloor (Thompson and McHugh, 1990, 74). This corporate wave is still influential to this day, although some of the tenets of its conception would be shaken in turn by the economic crises of the '70s and the increasing competence from the Far East economies. In the ensuing turmoil, several different management

theories would vie for primacy, leading to the fragmented management field that we witness today. While some authors characterise this as a “network wave” in management practice (e.g., Engwall et al., 2001, 32), others argue that there is no single thread unifying this movement (Fernández Rodríguez, 2007, 33).

Works prior to the emergence of scientific management doubtlessly have great historical interest, but it is uncertain how far they have influenced subsequent practice. Bendix (1956) described them as mainly concerned with fostering individual discipline, self-management and conviction towards success in the largely unregulated and fragmented market economy of the late 19th century (see also Gantman, 2005). At that time, an overwhelming majority of businesses operated in local markets, at a scale that could be handled by the capital owner and family. The need for professional administration was minimal. However, concentration sharply increased in the last decades of the century, leading to growing functional specialisation and the consolidation of nation-wide mass markets. The management of production, distribution and financing under these conditions required increasingly sophisticated coordination and control structures, and the first salaried managers made their appearance. They would handle business operations for a salary, leading for the first time to a separation between ownership and control and therefore to a radical reconfiguration of capitalism (Burnham, 1941; Dahrendorf, 1959).

Great effort was devoted to scientific measurement of throughput and formalised processes of training, decision and evaluation. In the most significant work of managerial theory produced in this era, Taylor (1911) provided a solid account of the principles informing this scientific model. He argued that optimum productivity was dependent on complete, detailed planning of all shopfloor activities. All processes should be therefore carefully designed and measured by management, with no leeway or initiative allowed to the worker, in order to avoid the waste of time and materials. This clear demarcation between workers, supervisors and managers—with the responsibility for the design and control of work lying exclusively on the latter—carried the social division of labour to

an extreme.

Managers, in this view, would devote most of their time to systematic research on optimal processes, each in a highly specialised area, and to the selection of workers matched to the requirements of the job. Business and management schools, which had experienced explosive growth in the first years of the century (Sass, 1982; Winn, 1964), offered courses in production planning, personnel management and plant design, including the well-known time and motion studies. A positivist ideal of universally applicable scientific practices came to complement, not without resistance, the leadership ideology on which these schools had been founded.

Mass production and the rationalisation of work enabled companies to make significant savings from scale economies, and favoured the integration —both vertical and horizontal— and diversification that led to the industrial giants first appearing in the 1920s. First identified by Drucker (1946) and minutely documented not long afterwards by Chandler (1962), these great corporations would be one of the main features of mid-of-the-century culture and ideology. Galbraith (1958, 1967) argued that large-scale planning had become essential due to the high cost of research and development involved in producing high-technology goods. To offset these costs, the risk of competition should be diminished by long-term stabilisation of the labour, supply and consumer markets. Integration helped with the former two, while advertising was the basis of the latter.

The sheer size of corporations led them to establish largely autonomous divisions, independent from each other in practice and coordinated by a central office. Together with the successful experiences in centralised economic planning during World War I and Roosevelt's *New Deal*, this process led to the establishment of an industrial-military complex of enormous companies providing services to the American government itself, a model soon copied throughout Europe (Djelic, 1998; Kogut and Parkinson, 1993). The conflicts between workforce and management, rather visible in the first years of Taylorism, were partly



defused by the increasing affluence of the working class in these “Thirty Golden Years” of capitalism (Hobsbawm, 1995) and the advent of the consumer society. Although alienation and dissatisfaction with work remained, efforts were made to contain them—not least because of the palpable alternative offered by the East (Anderson, 1988).

Scientific management was still in full swing, and its adoption would progress for many more years—at different rates in different contexts (Guillén, 1994)—, but in the more advanced corporations the functions ascribed to management in Taylor’s works became then subordinate to the task of establishing the behemoth’s global strategy and market positioning. While optimisation remained an important interest, it focused now on problems of internal organisation and not on shop-floor processes, that had become by and large a routine matter. Engineering concerns thus gave way to strategic processes of decision about global positioning, requiring a summary knowledge of many different areas and emphasising leadership and attitude vis-à-vis the market rather than technical competence. Social issues also gained importance through the work of the Human Relations Movement headed by Mayo (1933), who found that satisfaction with work was largely dependent on an adequate matching between informal social mores and organisational imperatives. This showed that the strictly impersonal rationality of scientific management had to be filtered through attention to social structure to promote workplace harmony.

While this seemed to soften the exploitative domination of Taylorism, acknowledging the human side of workers, it entailed no change in the basic organisation of work. Braverman (1974) argued that the Human Relations Movement was not a substitute but a complement to scientific management, offering social engineering tools to accomplish the desired adaptation of workers to standardised procedures. The rationalist ideal of scientific organisation was preserved in the search for “objective” processes of control and workflow distribution. Drucker (1959), for example, promoted rational techniques for evaluating managerial work, such as management by objectives, and for efficiently allocating

decision tasks throughout the organisation, such as decentralisation. The overall conception of managerial work, however, lost its previous association with engineering to adopt psychodynamic and strategic aspects.

Both technical and economic pressures motivated a progressive shift from this trend towards integration. The financial shocks of the '70s showed the weaknesses of the multidimensional corporation in comparison to the smaller, more agile production structure of certain Asian firms, especially Japanese. At the same time, the continuous saturation of markets by consumer goods led to a growing fragmentation of consumer preferences. This did away with the mass market that had been the basis of Fordist production (Piore and Sabel, 1984) and marked the advent of “lifestyle” as a concept. Dissatisfaction with the homogenisation imposed by mass production influenced the appearance of “postindustrial” values associated with personal choice rather than class ascription (Inglehart, 1977), as well a *critique artiste* that denounced the alienating and mechanising aspects of work (Boltanski and Chiappello, 1999, 537ff).

Techniques for facing risks and meeting challenges thus became the staples of managerial doctrine, intending to ensure the feasibility of continuous adaptation to an unstable market. This led practitioners to promote a reduction in company size, splitting divisions off from each other in order to provide an exclusive focus on their most profitable capabilities. Some models of Japanese origin were touted as a solution to both organisational rigidity and worker disaffection, reducing the need to maintain stocks and centrally allocate resources by shifting these responsibilities to workers themselves (Ohno, 1978; Ouchi, 1981). Secondary services, integrated, during the previous wave began to be externalised in order to downsize corporate structure, a trend facilitated by the establishment of industrial standards such as ISO. The more acute issues of coordination presented by such a scheme greatly benefited from the development of information technology, enabling automated collection and quick processing of data. Together with skills in this area, communication and financial analysis became the cornerstones of the managerial paradigm in this third wave, with

its themes of constant change, instability and flexibility.

The shift was not confined to technical aspects. Although authors at the time claimed that the influence of economic factors over ideology had diminished (e.g., Bell, 1976; Inglehart, 1977), the 1980s showed a marked strengthening of political and social conservatism and the advent of neoliberalism (Whitaker, 1987), with its cult of individual enterprise and the deregulation of markets. As the global social order changed from an organised to a disorganised capitalism (Lash and Urry, 1987), belief in the mediation of organised action to achieve social goals was fought in a variety of fronts. Managerial works of this era emphasised personal leadership and charisma as means for securing the commitment of workers, who were asked to become personally involved with the company. Conversely, all remains of the rational organisation of labour, with its bureaucratic procedures and its multiple checks to ensure the predictability of work, were explicitly disavowed (Peters and Waterman, 1982). Flexibility became not only an ideal for corporate structuring, but also for personal behaviour (Alonso and Fernández Rodríguez, 2006; Sennett, 1998).

Disorganisation was the dominant feature of management theory in these decades as well. The emphasis in innovation, “creative destruction” (Peters, 1992), revolution (Hammer and Champy, 1993) and the break with the past in general led to the rapid emergence of many different schools with often incompatible theories about management behaviour. Recipes for the maximisation of organisational effectiveness abounded. Among the most successful—in terms of diffusion and legitimation, not necessarily as tools for optimising throughput—were Theory Z (Ouchi, 1981), one-minute management (Blanchard and Johnson, 1982), intrapreneuring (Pinchot, 1985), Total Quality Management (Deming, 1986), the learning organization (Senge, 1990), effective habits (Covey, 1990), reengineering (Hammer and Champy, 1993), emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995), the balanced scorecard (Kaplan and Norton, 1996) and Six Sigma (Brue, 2002). Although these doctrines varied in scope and focus—ranging from psychological theories of individual behaviour, which only touch on business man-

agement as tools for human resources assessment, such as Goleman's, to organisational theories of work-flow optimisation, such as Hammer and Champy's, to tool-based approaches to specific management tasks, such as Kaplan and Norton's— they all focused more heavily in the “human factor” than the more financially-oriented models previously en vogue. Terms such as “empowerment”, “knowledge worker” and “management of the self” appeared prominently even in quantitative-oriented approaches. Others, like “intrapreneuring”, celebrated the rôle of the individual within the structure— although always with corporate goals in mind (see, for a somewhat extreme example of this rhetoric, Porto and Smith, 2006).

The advice to flatten hierarchies is one of the few points common to these trends, as well as the growing importance of information technologies and the increasingly charismatic leadership of senior managers, but a discipline where breaking with the rules becomes the main piece of advice is almost impossible to understand coherently. Although the global trend is to emphasise personal competences, social skills and an almost mystic belief in creativity and commitment (Covey, 1990; Goleman, 1995; Kanter, 2001) at the expense of rational decision processes, many of the most widely touted doctrines remain concerned with the efficient handling of resources (Kaplan and Norton, 1996) and the administration of knowledge (Nonaka and Nishiguchi, 2001; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995) in rather classical terms. An important consequence is that it becomes difficult to identify the form and direction of the flow of ideas. As notions and terms shift quickly, and research programmes often fail to coalesce, the processes of development and adoption of innovations are often hard to distinguish.

It is doubtful to what extent a unified conception can emerge from the very different tasks, values and norms involved in the practice of management through these different stages. While it is clear that management's rôle has become so firmly entrenched in contemporary social life that its historical origins seem invisible (Collins, 2000, 69), its status as a discipline seems less clear. Khurana et al. (2005, 8) argue that there is a “void at the center of the business

school curriculum”, especially as the lack of a common conceptual framework is evident (McKinley et al., 1999, 634–636). Managers of the first wave modelled their practice on scientific specialisation, seeking to master the different stages of production, from R&D to distribution and after-sales service, and to devise an engineering model of personnel handling. The second wave subordinated these activities to the far more general analysis of the interaction of multiple divisions, and large scale decisions about organisational structure and competitive market orientation. With the downsizing and flexibilisation of the nineties, much of this coordination work has devolved into the workforce. This has left managers to handle its motivation and induction into corporate values, as well as the continuous liaising with partners and customers.

Sass (1985, 208) sees the establishment of the MBA and the widespread use of the case system as the most enduring contribution to the establishment of management, closely linking the university system and corporate culture into a matrix for the reproduction of the elite. In this view, the evolution of the discipline is not solely induced by the technological and social environment in which managerial action takes place, but also results from disciplinary tensions arising from conflicting competences and different social valuations attached to practices. This promising insight into understanding the practice and theory of management as a *field* (Bourdieu, 1994, 326) where different forms of capital and principles of judgement seek to establish themselves as legitimate goes, however, beyond the bounds of this research. We now turn to a discussion of how these stages in management history were expressed in its literature, from the first journals to the contemporary explosion of the popular management field.

### **1.2.2 Management publishing across time**

Much like management itself, managerial literature was hardly identifiable as a distinct field until the corporate wave was well under way. Early works, prior to the advent of scientific management, were essentially essays of a social orientation, seeking to provide justification for the nascent industrial capitalism

(Gantman, 2005). The writers of the first wave themselves lacked for the most part specialised venues for publication. Taylor, who was a member of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers, sought at first to publish his *Principles* under its aegis, just as Fayol (1916) would see his work printed by the *Bulletin de la Société de l'Industrie minérale*. Studies of a more social vein continued with the essayistic tradition; Mary Parker Follett (1924), for example, conceived her management doctrine as a continuation of her own earlier works on democracy and local government.

Only when both managerial work as a career and business education were well entrenched, in full swing of the corporate wave, practitioner-oriented publications became distinctive. Journals in business specialities appeared early in the century, the first being those on accounting: *Journal of Accounting*, 1905, and *Accounting Review*, 1926. The more ambitious general management discipline would have to wait until the '50s, when *Management Science*, *Administrative Science Quarterly* and the *Academy of Management Journal* were founded in quick succession (1954, 1956 and 1958, respectively) (Engwall, 1998, 95). This evolution was closely linked with the attempts to provide an account of the nature of the much-desired “science of management”, of which Carlson (1951) is an early example (see also Gordon and Howell, 1959; Pierson, 1959, known as the Ford and Carnegie reports). Professional journals sought to keep practitioners abreast of the novelties in the field, summarising research and presenting innovative techniques.

In the following years the importance of scientific management principles would decrease within the managerial curriculum, which incorporated other influences and became increasingly distinct from engineering. The first widely read author on strictly managerial topics, Peter Drucker, published influential works in the 1940s, including the first accounts of the nature of corporations (Drucker, 1946). At the same time, the first efforts towards a systematisation of management knowledge began. Urwick (1943) consolidated the influence of Taylor, Fayol and Follett in general principles for improving managerial effec-

tiveness. Some essential elements in management lore date from this era, such as the need for a single executive officer at the top of the management hierarchy and some classical summaries of managerial functions, which Gulick (1937) enduringly resumed in the acronym PODSCORB: planning, organising, directing, staffing, coordinating, reporting, and budgeting.

In the 1950s Drucker's stature as the first guru grew, and a number of clearly pedagogical titles (Drucker, 1954, 1964, 1967) inaugurated the doctrinaire tradition. This decade would see both the emergence of economics as a key factor in business knowledge, and the growing emphasis on theories of behaviour and organisation (Engwall, 1995a; Jönsson, 1996), coincident with the more general conception of management as leadership that the business schools, especially Harvard, fostered. Management publications and theories, however, remained rather close to academia, and there was significant interaction with sociological and psychological research. The work of Herzberg et al. (1959) or Likert (1961), for example, successfully combined a managerial orientation and rigorous scholarship.

This stage, however, did not outlast the crises in the Fordist mode of production in the 1970s. As confidence in the robustness of the multidivisional corporate model faltered, and futurologists such as Toffler (1970, 1980) announced the end of the industrial era, management writers turned elsewhere for inspiration. Some sought it outside the West, as the flurry of publications concerning Japanese management systems attests. Others sought it outside systematic, "rational" organisational schemes, and this would strongly reflect in popular, writing, which experienced a sudden boom in the early 1980s.

While the influential work of Porter (1980) was still firmly located in the corporate tradition, Peters and Waterman's 1982 *In Search of Excellence* was the first major hit of a largely new movement, and focused on some of the subjects that would characterise popular writing for many years: leanness, autonomy, individuality, commitment, emulation of the successful. Perhaps in answer to the generally gloomy social and economic prognoses of the time

(Fernández Rodríguez, 2007, 28), McKinsey consultants Peters & Waterman promoted the notion that “people”, not systems, were the answer to economic success. Notably, they argued that a bias for action rather than reflection characterises “excellent” companies. Embracing action —specifically the kind of action promoted by the authors— would be the single way out of the crisis, showing an alarmist strategy that would become a distinctive element in these texts (Webster, 2002). Despite severe criticism from a theoretical standpoint (e.g., Aupperle et al., 1986; Hitt and Ireland, 1987; Johnson et al., 1985) and rapid empirical disavowal of the example excellent companies (BusinessWeek, 1984), the book remained steadily at the top of the best-seller charts, and eventually became one of the biggest selling management books ever. Both its expository style —centred in the presentation of eight simple, slogansque themes, which were held to be responsible for the success of the presented companies— and its focus on the personal qualities of both staff and customer, rather than on more formal mathematical and financial governance, provided a model that would be assiduously imitated in the following years.

Popular business texts experienced a dramatic increase in number and diffusion in this decade, and many of the new managerial techniques and doctrines mentioned in the previous section came straight from the pen of consultants and managers through the popular press, without undergoing prior academic scrutiny. Kipping and Armbrüster (1998, 2000) note how consultancy increasingly overlapped the knowledge-producing rôle of academia, as well as not a few of its educational functions. Both of them became closely integrated with media (Engwall et al., 2001, 59), sometimes producing journals and books indistinguishable at first sight from their more conventional peers. Reception studies have revealed that the difference between academic and popular writing is not always apparent to readers (Pagel and Westerfelhaus, 2005, 432), and prominent academics have authored best-selling books. One of the most surprising and often quoted results of this sudden increase in management authorship has been the constant flux of concepts and methods that quickly spread and almost



as quickly disappear from public attention. While a few findings of popular authors and consultants have been lastingly adopted in business curricula, the number of ideas that pass from common use even before they can be integrated in education is enormous (Lindvall, 1998).

Jackson (2001a) makes a similar point, noting that the sources judged as legitimate authors for management knowledge have experienced a singular widening. His own study is concerned with the growing trend towards use of quotations from literature, especially the classics, as legitimating arguments and warrants for management techniques, but the remark is equally applicable to related phenomena. Huczynski (1993, see also Collins, 2000, 68), for example, noted that biographies of successful entrepreneurs and tales of corporate struggle are often used as foundational legends to legitimate a certain course of action. Fernández Rodríguez (2007, 311) mentions the growing importance of fables and management novels, such as Goldratt and Cox (1984), in the diffusion of managerial novelties and beliefs. Mazza and Álvarez (2000) view this shift of emphasis as a progressive transition from a more academic culture, characterised by an *esprit de géométrie*—where knowledge is formally and explicitly formulated—to a model based on tacit knowledge and the accompanying *esprit de finesse*

Micklethwait and Wooldridge (1997), in a scathing critique of popular management authors, viewed this “management theory industry” as a close analogue of mass-produced entertainment. While the similarities may be striking, such an analysis does not explain why organisations “appear to be drawn—almost cultlike—to embrace constant change” (Zorn et al., 1999), a sometimes very costly activity. In the following section, we discuss some of the explanatory models offered by authors in various disciplines to account for the nature of management literature and its historical development.

### 1.2.3 Understanding popular management literature: a literature review

Despite the importance of popular management literature, scholarship on the topic is yet scarce in disciplines such as the sociology of scientific knowledge or discourse studies. (Jackson, 1996, 572) notes that the dismissal of gurus' theories has often led to a dismissal of the importance of their works. For the most part, it has been management academics that have offered their views, producing an extensive corpus of research on the validity of popular writing on management and its relation to academic thought. This inquiry has largely been directed to the influence of popular management literature as a vector of production and diffusion for innovations in managerial doctrine, a rôle in which it has substituted for more conventional academic venues and exerted a significant effect over community practices.

On the whole, these investigations have presented a constant and often hostile challenge to the claims of popular management literature. Unlike the relationship between scientific literature proper and popular science, which is marked by the occasional conflict about misinterpretation but remains on the whole peaceful, academics in management have set out to wage what Collins (2001a, 32) expressively termed "an all-out battle for the hearts and minds of management". Indicted as a "management advice industry" (Jackson, 2001a, 486), popular writing has come under intense criticism from scholars and educators in the field. The effectiveness of this challenge to the growing influence of popular management writing remains so far doubtful. This literature is still being published in great quantities, and the recipes it promotes routinely adopted by practitioners. Moreover, it has often just grazed the surface of broader social issues, such as the relationship of management theory and practice to social organisation or its ideological character.

In this section, we review approaches to popular management literature, classifying them in three broad groups. The first are texts seek to understand the

reasons for the *adoption of managerial beliefs* in more or less sophisticated terms, variously drawing on social, psychological and experimental criteria. These are often critical towards popular writing, but the extent of this criticism addresses only its practical validity, and does not look at broader issues of social power except in a very limited way. An orientation to the power and political issues underlying managerial practice characterise *Critical Management Studies*, an increasingly active movement challenging mainstream management theory and seeking to frame its shortcomings within broader social and economic issues. While studies self-identifying as CMS have only rarely tackled the nature of popular management writing as such, these and closely aligned works provide important insights on this field. Lastly, we explore the scarce *discursively oriented studies of management literature*, as well as those that have addressed rhetorical and linguistic issues in these texts.

### **1.2.3.1 Competing theories within management**

Management may be a recent newcomer to academia, but its history is long enough to have merited a number of reviews of its theoretical development, both scholarly and popular. More or less systematic summaries appeared early enough. We have already mentioned the pioneering effort of Gulick and Urwick (1937), which sought to provide a balanced account of the field so far. It was soon complemented by a more thorough account penned by Urwick and Brech (1945a,b), three volumes recapitulating the advent and institutionalisation of scientific management. This valuable work, however, predates the most important shifts in modern management thought, and therefore offers a unitary image utterly unlike the field as we know it. By contrast, Daniel Wren (1979) offered a sequential periodisation, distinguishing a pre-scientific era, the scientific management movement, a later social stage and finally a mature period.

Historical works such as these offer a classification of managerial research traditions, but rarely do they seek to account for historical shifts or subsume them under a single unitary framework. The history of management often seems

to be the history of a succession of great thinkers with little notion of context or continuity. Clutterbuck and Crainer (1990), for example, focus on the main figures in management history and the reasons for their influence, rather than on the intellectual movements which they drew on and helped shape. Their taxonomy follows the main historical trends —scientific management, systems and organisation theory, behaviourism, strategic planning, leadership, etc.— without theorising on the reasons for their succession. Neither is the closure of management thought at any point explained. Many of the authors they present could be rightly portrayed as academic sociologists and psychologists rather than management thinkers.

Other books function as primers, providing succinct summaries of the work and profile of leading gurus in simplified form and with no attention to their own evolution or connection. Boyett and Boyett (1999), for example, have made a career out of these summaries, applying this model to most areas of management thought and related disciplines. By their own nature, historical or pedagogic works of this kind provide almost no analysis of the processes of creation, selection and adaptation that management knowledge undergoes both within academia and in its adoption by practitioners. However, this has been an important academic concern. Although seldom reflexive and largely uninformed by related disciplines, such as the sociology of scientific knowledge or the growing body of work on public understanding of science, the question of how and why management ideas take hold has been an important one (Sturdy, 2004, 156). Many of the studies quoted in the past sections were penned with the intention of exploring a channel for diffusion —such as consultancy (Kipping, 2002; Salaman, 2002) or business education (Amdam, 2001; Winn, 1964)—, a historical process —such as “Americanisation” (Djelic, 1998; Kogut and Parkinson, 1993; Locke, 1989)— or a regional field —such as Scandinavian management (Engwall, 1996; Johanne Pettersen et al., 2002). Although explanatory models are often hybrid in nature and do not dwell at length on the theoretical bases underlying their project, basically uncritical approaches can be broadly grouped

in three categories: *rational*, *cultural* and *institutional*.<sup>1</sup>

**1.2.3.1.1 Rational approaches** What can be termed, for lack of a better label, the “rational view” of management evolution echoes the account of scientific knowledge provided by the classical authors, from Condorcet (1795) and Whewell (1837) onwards: ideas are devised as possible solutions for experienced problems, tested in practice by application in (preferably controlled) environments and evaluated. If results falsify their predictions, they should be discarded in favour of an alternative (Burns and Wholey, 1993; Popper, 1969). In practical terms, this entails calculating the probable output of alternative practices and choosing the optimal one. This view is ideally exemplified by the classic works by Rogers (1983, 1995) in the diffusion of technological innovations: the most effective solutions (often in terms of costs) would achieve diffusion by an evolutionary survival of the fittest, winnowing out alternatives and leading to a maximally efficient situation.

The prevalence of this view in professional literatures is nevertheless only partial. One would be hard pressed to find studies that attempt to robustly explain the practices of management knowledge production, diffusion and adoption solely on the ground of rigorous empirical testing —although works such as Tidd (2001) may come quite close to it. As a normative ideal, however, it functions as the implicit foundation for the many studies seeking correlations between performance and choice of managerial programme, such as those of Huselid (1995) and Wood (1999) about the efficacy of Human Resources Management. That is, while not necessarily considered as an accurate empirical assessment of real practice, it is posited as a model for which it should strive.

The tenets of rational choice theory have come under the attack of economic, sociological and philosophical theory, and we will not dwell upon them here.<sup>2</sup> Some of these criticisms have found ample echo in the more sophisticated of accounts adopting a broadly rationalistic outlook, who readily acknowledge that contextual restrictions impose some empirical limitations over the ideal pattern

of testing: there are expenses associated with the collection of information, formalised laboratory settings where variables could be tested in isolation are not really available for most practical problems, and inexact indirect indices are all that is often available for measurement.

Other researchers have focused on how thorough rational analysis may actually be counter-productive for the company: not only does it increase the costs of data collection, but also the number of inspections to which workers are subjected, thus fostering a hostile work environment (Power, 1997). Thus, advocates of leaner management in the 1980s promoted self- or team-evaluation in lieu of costly managerial assessment.<sup>3</sup> On these grounds, some alternative, limited-rationality models have been offered for predicting or evaluating managerial action. Phillips (2000), for example, suggests employing rigorous evaluation only for high-cost decisions, and Glückler and Armbrüster (2003) explore the best-known proxy for theoretical validity, the prestige of those companies who have adopted the technique.

This last approach brings us very close to *institutional* or *contagion* models, where diffusion comes from contact or observation of other adopters, to which we turn presently.<sup>4</sup>

**1.2.3.1.2 Cultural approaches** Rational paradigms proceed from the premise that circumstances may vary, but principles for action and choice remain constant and can be formulated in abstraction from context. Institutional theories, by contrast, focus on how conventional expectations, inherited arrangements and normative schemes embedded in socialisation radically define patterns of preference and action (Powell and DiMaggio, 1991). On a theoretical level, this describes culture-based approaches as well, but the latter have often been regarded separately, and we follow that convention here.

Studies on the effects of culture have ranged from the national and regional dimensions, with studies focusing on the limits and constraints to the diffusion of practices and ideas across national borders (Guirdham, 1999; Hofstede, 1980),

to more specific sectoral (Parker, 1995) and even organisation-specific cultures (Cartwright and Cooper, 1996). The basic focus of these studies has been on the shared, often tacit, assumptions that underlie the viability of practices in different contexts, including knowledge-adoption practices (Warner, 1991), leading to their differential success. Further nuances concern the degree of this embeddedness, with some kinds of practices being readily adaptable to different environments, while others may be closely tied to specific assumptions (Bhagat et al., 2002; Czarniawska and Sevón, 1996).

A frequent concern in this regard has been “Americanisation” and the nature of a hypothetical European school in management studies (Gemelli, 1996; Johanne Pettersen et al., 2002; Kipping and Bjarnar, 1998). While the question of American influence —be it directly in print media, or through the institutional channels of consulting practice and corporate fusion— has been more or less widely explored, especially in the context of globalisation research, the degree to which this is articulated with a wider global influence of the United States in culture has been largely neglected. Smith and Meiksins (1995) suggest the existence of a “dominance effect”, which would entail a higher cultural prestige for certain practices on the basis of their ascription to dominant groups, such as Japan or the United States. The political implications of such a process, while figuring conspicuously in imperialism theory —such as Wallerstein (1991)— have remained for the most part absent from research on management models. Although cultural sensitivity has been subsequently brought to the attention of managers as a requisite for successful performance —Child and Rodrigues (1996) or Cyr and Schneider (1996), for example, highlight the need for understanding the different contexts from which partners in multinational organisations or joint ventures are drawn in order to accurately program practice, and bring attention to the important variations in convention within organisational structures (Edwards et al., 1998)—, the way control and command relations are embedded in these and may hinder or foster different patterns of thought and action is seldom considered by those focusing on cultural aspects.

Rather, it is institutional theory that seeks to involve both dimensions in a more complex model.

**1.2.3.1.3 Institutional approaches** Institutional approaches to management knowledge have been dominant for some time, as they provide a much more sophisticated portrayal of the situation than rational choice ones, even if broader issues of power and agency often go unanalysed.

In fact, the question of agency has spurred several revisions of institutional theory. In its earliest form, institutionalisation was one of the elements in the structural-functionalist model of Talcott Parsons (1951). He argued that socially sanctioned behaviour patterns and normative standards are adopted by adequately socialised actors as their own, because noncompliance would result in feelings of moral inadequacy (37). As such, it left no room for individual orientation or strategy, and did not account for change. Seeking to counter this imbalance, Berger and Luckmann (1967, 59) described the institutionalisation of values and patterns as a process of “habitualisation” and “typification” taking place as the externalised products of human action become objectified as “social facts” independent of volition, and as such are internalised again. The progressive routinisation of action serves to discharge the cognitive tension presented by the need to choose and select from the very vast array of theoretically possible choices. Finally, neo-institutionalist analyses emphasise the rôle of individuals seeking to coordinate their action in the face of conflicts of interest and position in the formation of institutions (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983).

Thus, neo-institutional theory focuses on the movement towards, and the maintenance of, institutional norms through processes that range from the outright coercive to the more or less consciously mimetic, to spontaneous tendencies to isomorphism due to common backgrounds and dispositions. Research in this line views the establishment of belief as disciplinary or professional knowledge as a process of legitimacy-building. Different institutional actors produce, diffuse and support rules for selecting what should become part of the common trope



of valid statements and what remains foreign, fringe or unacceptable. Members of an institution are deemed to draw selectively from the available cognitive alternatives based on their own position in the ideological continuum, but also on the prevailing norms and values in the milieu in which they have to act. This accounts for the trend towards homogeneity and normalised behaviour in any given field.<sup>5</sup>, and helps explain why and how actual practices may deviate from the optimally efficient models assumed in other theoretical frameworks. (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983, 23)

Álvarez (1996, 1997) argues that the standardisation and typification of management knowledge of is performed by academics, educators and consultants under more or less stringent conditions (Álvarez et al., 1999, 3). Training institutions and companies themselves seek to create technical and routine patterns out of the highly specialised and cognitively demanding knowledge produced at the scientific end of the management field. Educational institutions used to be the main actors in the diffusion process that follows, which normalises patterns of action as the only expectable way to proceed under certain circumstances, thus becoming typical. By this process, theories become ingrained as procedural knowledge, relinquishing part of their complexity in order to become more easily applicable— although harder to challenge epistemically. This rôle has increasingly been filled by other actors, including consultancy firms—who prepare and develop standardised procedures for their customers' use—and the popular press.

In a third phase, these claims are legitimated and conceived as highly autonomous mechanisms. Individual actors experience them not as the result of deliberate action, but rather as natural facts, internalising them in the same process of socialisation that provides them with the cognitive tools required to act as managers. The term employed by Álvarez may be misleading, as the crucial feature distinguishing this phase from the former ones is not legitimation itself—since processes of legitimation are also at work in the more reduced scientific and practitioner communities (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984; Myers, 1990)— but

rather the fact that at this stage the warrants and arguments used to assess the theory shift from technical and theoretical propositions to broader assumptions grounded on a given ideology about the world, economy and organizational life (Álvarez et al., 1999, 4). While fit and applicability may always be challenged in other processes of diffusion, in this phase support is drawn from general assertions about the world that are assumed to be shared within a given community. This process entails coding the theories as fast, easily replicable schemata (Sahlin-Andersson, 1996).

Mazza and Álvarez (2000) present three forms of legitimation: conformity, endorsement and dramatisation. *Conformity* with the external environment entails adapting to standardised procedures, which may required by law, useful for interoperability and the recruiting of personnel, or simply known to be dominant. Theories and practices gain legitimacy, therefore, when many business firms adopt them, or when the adoption is publicly reported by popular media. As they are widely regarded as the state-of-the-art in management, their uptake increases in what has been termed the “bandwagon effect”. This conformity may often be only symbolic, carried out only at the level of vocabulary and identifying symbols. The inherent vagueness of theory at this stage, often expressed in highly ambiguous labels, indexes this behaviour, and what is actually done to conform may vary significantly. Conformity may also provide a defence in the case of failures: plans relying upon institutionalised techniques are more likely to be perceived as rational and appropriate, even in the face of bad performance.

*Endorsement* by powerful collective actors, who define the rules for the evaluation of organizational actions, expresses enduring social support. This provides management theories and practices with taken-for-grantedness. Leaders establish the practices that other organizations should follow or imitate to signal alignment; if they invest in a practice, the expectation is that it should provide a positive return. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) term this phenomenon “mimetic isomorphism”. In highly industrialized countries, the powerful actors are large

or State-tied firms, who provide legitimacy because of their traditional leading status and institutional linkages, as well as young and profitable firms, who provide legitimacy by pioneering profitable fields.

*Dramatisation* involves the construction of legends and myths about spectacularly good or bad events. Top management is often guided in their strategic decision making by the legends of successful innovations, often reported by newspapers and magazines as the new frontier of management or as star cases. The dramatisation of such business successes also creates a powerful narrative for managerial action. The popular press, due to increased presence and prestige, has increased the impact that this last phase has on the overall process of production of management knowledge. This influence has been explained in terms of the knowledge dynamics within the field, whereby the popular publications have historically set the topics for more academic outlets; in terms of the redefined rôle of institutional educations; in terms of the kind of knowledge required for management practice —largely informal, tacit and often combining many different sources in an unstable mix (Schon, 1983)—;

or in terms of its practical bent, whereby it shares much of the directive impulse of political thought rather than a purely contemplative attitude.

Also largely based on institutional tenets is the fashion (or fad) model of popular management writing advanced by Abrahamson (1991), that holds that the theories and practices it proposes take place like “a flu epidemic, quickly spreading and leaving people and organizations worse for wear” (Coulson-Thomas, 1996, 18). Abrahamson (1996, 254) defines a fashion as a “relatively transitory collective belief, disseminated by the discourse of management-knowledge entrepreneurs, that a management technique is at the forefront of rational management progress”. His emphasis lies specifically on why a large body of discourse on discourse is constantly in a state of transience. Following Zucker (1988, 26), he holds that the fashions actually adopted for any length of time are in fact a small minority. He seeks to account for this fact by the active pull of fashion-setters away from institutionalised behaviour and towards a rapidly-

changing scheme of lucrative fashions (Abrahamson and Fairchild, 1999).

Thus, Abrahamson conceives the fashion-setting process as a continuous displacement of readers' beliefs about the most rational way to pursue their goals by a constantly shifting discourse. Exogenous social forces shape demand for certain solutions, collectively constructing the desire for results that are not fulfilled by current performance. Nevertheless, it is the endogenous process of fashion-setting that presents this gap between intended goals and experienced results as addressable by management knowledge —instead of, for example, a natural and unavoidable part of business life. Thus, even the independent triggers are mediated by the properties of the knowledge field.

Abrahamson makes use of the notion of “superstitious learning” suggested by Levitt and March (1988, 325), a process whereby a subjective experience of learning is achieved, even though the premises and the outcome are not meaningfully connected in any way. Under these circumstances, adoption or rejection of fashions is motivated solely by rhetorical and social causes, since empirical verifiability is unattainable. Fashions, in this view, are pulled forward by the anxiety that consumers experience due to the identification and discursive production of performance gaps. Discourse that purports to identify the causes of the gap and provide a solution to it is consumed compulsively.

In this view, the constant swinging back and forth of fashionable discourse is evidenced by variations in emotional tone. Abrahamson characterises the process of fad diffusion by a cyclical alternation of superstitious, highly emotional language mainly produced by the popular press and the fashion-setters themselves, and rational, highly critical language mainly produced by sources closer to the academic world. Emotional language is intended to attend to the consumers' anxiety, a sympathetic effect of similar anxieties experienced by the writer, or even a rhetorical technique calculated to provoke empirical action. In any case, its result is euphoria (Abrahamson, 1991), but the impossibility to sustain it in turn causes more detailed examination and eventual rejection of the proposals (Gill and Whittle, 1992). Abrahamson, however, does not analyse

whether this process shows overall changes in the rationality or superstitiousness of discourse.

The fad model gave rise to a number of empirical analysis centred in citation counts to ascertain the points in a theory's development; they show an inverted-U-shaped evolution, with a period of increase, a peak and a decline, although the rates of both processes vary significantly according to country and period (Abrahamson and Fairchild, 1999; Benders and van Veen, 2001; Gibson and Tesone, 2001). Carson et al. (2000) provide empirical proof that the turnover has increased, with the period from initial diffusion to peak falling from a mean of 14.8 years in the 50s-70s to 7.5 in the 80s and a striking 2.6 in the 90s.

<sup>6</sup> In later studies, Abrahamson and Eisenman (2001) found that fashionable discourses do not need to actually improve performance to be effective in controlling which fads get picked up and framing subsequent production in that line to follow consumers' preferences, at the same time reinforcing them. This explains the relative stability of certain management fashions, even in spite of their disappointing results.

A particularly interesting analysis within this approach is that of Huczynski (1993), who focused on the different avenues to becoming a management guru. Although he applies this label especially to relatively modern authors, such as Drucker or Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1995, 2001), he groups them together with earlier practitioners whose advice had gained similar cult status among corporate managers. Classified in several schools, from scientific management to modern entrepreneurial perspectives, gurus are said to come from three sources: academia, if they manage to address their writing to a broader audience than the peer group; consulting, when practical advice prepared in the field becomes codified and generalised; and management itself, when hero CEOs such as Jack Welch provide write-ups of their own strategies and beliefs. Huczynski argues that management theories are widely appropriated and their authors promoted to gurdome when they reflect the dominant beliefs and immediate fears of managers. Consequently, they are most often pitched to address these needs. Rather

than theoretical novelty or empirical proof, it is adequacy with the ideological beliefs of the managerial class that fosters the popularity of a theory, especially inasmuch as it legitimises managerial authority.

The wide umbrella of fashion theory covers many incompatible accounts, focusing on very different aspects of knowledge production, transmission and consumption, and the specifics of research conducted under this name have varied among its incarnations. Hilmer and Donaldson (1996a), for example, adopt some institutional explanations, but remain staunchly positivist in their own positioning, close to the theories reviewed above. Other writers lay a great deal of emphasis in the rhetorical packaging of managerial theory, addressing both aesthetic components and, to a lesser extent, cognitive management of new information and epistemological warrants. Strang and Meyer (1994), for example, addressed the rhetoric of similarity used to promote the view that most organizations are similar entities, and thus can equally benefit from the adoption of the common framework presented by the guru. This approximates it to a number of theories classified elsewhere in our review, showing the fluidity of these boundaries. However, its core tenets are firmly rationalist. Although it employs institutional categories for analysis, it is clear that belief in technical optimisation is central, and at no point it presents a challenge to managerial hegemony. In the next section we review theories that adopt exactly such a critical stance.

### **1.2.3.2 Critical studies on management**

Institutional approaches have doubtlessly represented a critical force in management, as they have provided an extensive critique of the simplifications of rational choice and similar theories. In a more sophisticated sense, they have also been critical in their intent to make analysts aware of the socially constructed character of everyday understandings. However, there is no attempt to turn this awareness into a reason for action. Institutionalism, in any of its versions, has aspired to provide objective description (Cooper et al., 2008). Those

who have opted to follow through with the call to transformation are loosely grouped here as *critical* approaches.

However, the extent and nature of this transformation is not uniformly conceived. From neo-institutional conservatism to the radicalism of Critical Management Studies a wide range of degrees of critique are available. We first survey those authors who have criticised the guru system of popular management writing, before addressing those who pursue a more radical transformation of management practices.

**1.2.3.2.1 Guru theory** The boom of popular management writers in the early 1980s attracted criticism from its very onset. We have already noted the dismissive appraisal of (Freeman, 1985, 349), who wrote that “[business best sellers are] more fad than trend, and as such will have no major impact on organizational life 10 years hence”. Other authors, like Huczynski (1993), whom we reviewed *supra*, have sought to explain the enduring character of these texts in spite of the (academically) unsound standards they follow. These explanations often focus on the personal characteristics of managers themselves, such as their relative lack of scientific training, or the intrinsic requirements of their organisational rôle:

First, the nature of organisational life places responsibility on managers to *perform* and *achieve* in a context where often they neither understand how their actions produce results, nor are able to influence [...] other people. Second, partly as a result of this uncertainty, their assessment of themselves is also under downward pressure (Huczynski, 1993, 171)

The desire to “fit in” with other practitioners would be one of the driving forces of the expansion of popular advice, and the establishment of moderately lasting fashions. Similarly, Jackall (1988) claims that managers’ positions within organisations induce them to seek a framework for securely organising experience, no matter what its actual effectiveness. In his view, the “troubling,

ambiguous, and anxiety-laden” (13) world in which managers perform precludes the application of moral criteria. Rather, the habits fostered by managerial work lead them to project on themselves and their own actions the same objectifying and utilitarian outlook they use for appraising others.

However, neither Jackall nor Huczynski argue for any sort of radical change in management. The latter, as an “agnostic” (Collins, 2000, 103), is unconcerned with prognosis. The former seeks to suggest changes to corporate culture, but not its structure. Micklethwait and Wooldridge (1997), who review prevalent schools of thought on management, hold a similar position. They argue that guru recipes are almost invariably oversimplified and underdeveloped as a result of its rôle within the big business of management consulting and education. While they critically assess the tendency to apply the latest management fad with no regard for contextual circumstances and no adaptation, they not deem flexible application to be necessarily harmful. Many of the most obvious targets of critique are addressed: the insistence on buzzwords, the underhand recycling of well-established practices under new names, and the inconsistency between theories, but whatever structural relation these may bear to the corporate order is not analysed.

**1.2.3.2.2 Critical Management Studies** Critical Management Studies (CMS), on the other hand, are concerned with precisely that kind of relation. This generic label groups a loose array of scholarly attempts to radically revise and transform management practice, analysing and altering its ideological grounds. Mainstream management approaches are concerned with maximising the output of the factors of production, such as human knowledge and physical goods, to increase profits. Whatever concern is voiced for the development and well-being of workers and the community as a whole, as in stakeholder theory, is intended to ensure the steady flow of profit that may be compromised by more directly oppressive practices. CMS take issue with this outlook, that has become so deeply naturalised in management thought as to constitute its



taken-for-granted common sense, and “portray current management practices as institutionalized, yet fundamentally precarious, outcomes of (continuing) struggles between those who have mobilised resources to impose these practices and others who to date have lacked the resources to mount an effective challenge and thereby establish an alternative” (Adler et al., 2007, 129).

A detailed description of the different strands in CMS is beyond the scope of this study. What distinguishes CMS proper is the application of critical methodologies—such as Frankfurtian *Kritische Theorie*, Foucauldian archaeology or deconstructionism—from within business disciplines themselves. First united under a collective label by Alvesson and Willmott (1992), CMS have since developed into a significant movement, with biennial conferences and dedicated journals, but still retains great variety in approaches and ideologies within the general frame of progressive criticism.

The origins of CMS can be traced back to sociological analyses of the ideologies prevalent in industrial corporations, such as Bendix (1956), as well as labour process theory exploring the exploitation of workers by capital owners (Braverman, 1974). There have been influential studies on how power relations influence the diffusion and consumption of management knowledge—both in the relatively straightforward aspect of the control of the means of diffusion (Smith and Meiksins, 1995), and the more convoluted disputes for power within the organisation, in the academic terrain and in the wider social field in which managers are involved (Buchanan and Badham, 1999; Chanlat, 1996).

From the first point of view, the ownership and control of the principal press firms, of mediating consultancy agencies and of education has been explored. Large corporations, with an important public presence and often tied to influential research and practice centres, have a proportionate influence on the flow of ideas, reinforced in turn by the widespread trend to draw on their stories as models of “best practice” (Álvarez, 2000). Organisations tend to model themselves after what they perceive as successful actors in their field, thus leading to a massive influence for these models. At a more general level, this leads to

an exploration of national prevalence in the discipline. American and market-liberal ideas receive special promotion all over the world and are incorporated into the management curriculum (Locke, 1989). The occupation of gate-keeping positions allows certain actors to exert an influential regulatory power on the discourses that reach public ears and the silencing of dissenting voices.

On a different level, however, management has been viewed as fulfilling a crucial task in the general social field— that of arguing for a given mode of production, capitalist organisation of labour, and the interests of a given class, managerial white-collar workers. The potential conflict between nominal owners and managers suggested by Dahrendorf (1959) was taken up by researchers exploring the use of managerial theory to promote the views of different occupational sectors and cohort or individual careers (Armstrong, 1986; Whittington and Whipp, 1992). Not all studies assume that this goal is consciously and cynically sought by practitioners, however. This influence may be an indirect effect of the managers' pursuit of professional goals and give rise to prescriptions on behaviour, feeling and identity only through the projection of the leaders' characteristics or prejudiced assumptions (du Gay et al., 1996; Sinclair, 1997).

While much of the discussion of this sort of relationships concerns the rôle of hegemonic practices and ideologies, a broader political view presents the management, academic and social fields as the objects of a dispute for control, and thus raises the question of contestation. Resistance from workers to managerial initiatives has been widely studied (Buchanan and Badham, 1999; Edwards, 1979), and in fact has become a common topic in analyses of the adoption of managerial discourse. The need for an already-structured language to present and provide warrants for managerial programmes is viewed as a strong influence for the adoption of solutions and theories (Pagel and Westerfelhaus, 2005; Thomas, 2003), while at the same time appearing as a source of reticence in itself from lower-ranking staff (Armstrong, 1994). Other fronts where resistance may appear are the conflictive relation between managers and consultants and the divergent approaches of diverse sectoral and organisational rôles.

Few of these, however, take into account the specifically political and macro-social dimension of work domination. A significant exception in this regard is the voluminous *Nouvel esprit du capitalisme* by Boltanski and Chiappello (1999), which views contemporary French managerial ideology on the background of the social conflicts of the 1960s, when many of the current managers belonged to the progressive student movement. The forms of administration and organisation since developed or espoused have, in their view, been greatly influenced by the spirit of the '68 movement. They argue that the promotion of work attitudes centred on self-management and relative independence conflate the *critique artiste* of capitalism presented by the student movement with a managerial bent, subsuming it in the corporate system. Ramsay (1977) had offered a more general version of this thesis, highlighting the adoption of more participatory schemes as a counterpoint to higher labour pressure, a model thoroughly explored in Harley et al. (2000).

A similar outlook is adopted by Gantman (2005), who provides a critical history of management thought from before the advent of scientific management to our days, focusing on the ideologies associated with each stage in the development of capitalism. He argues that each of its main phases —*laissez-faire*, organised and disorganised— shows “suggestive correspondences” with a managerial ideology. These ideologies are intended to legitimate capitalism as a “natural” and optimal scheme for the organisation of society, as well as justifying the unequal distribution of resources privileging an elite. Gantman’s contention is that managerial literature has been much less scientific than ideological, and has become more so over time, as expressed in the increasing amount of fictionalisation it experiences.

While relatively marginal within contemporary CMS, the analysis of popular management texts has been tackled by some influential authors lying at the fringes of the movement. Clark and Greatbatch (2004, 408), for example, ascribe a good many characteristics of popular management literature to the immediate commercial interest they further, viewing them as little more than promotional

material for their authors. In a detailed analysis of the production process of popular management books, they draw on interviews to authors, editors and other persons involved in the production of six management best-sellers in order to obtain information about the meaning they ascribed to management writing. They found that editorial staff often does much more than copy-editing and that originals often reach the publishing house as little more than an outline, whose actual content is then designed and penned by in-house authors in collaboration with the signatories. Even when the named authors provide a first draft, it is subsequently revised and rewritten by a host of specialised personnel. The interviewed editors acknowledged that this process of production was mainly geared to promote the “brand” of authors beyond books, in a range of products including audiotapes, presentations and training packages. Content is seen as secondary to the holistic image of a successful author that may imprint his seal to subsequent products.<sup>7</sup> In this regard editors and publishers act as gatekeepers, exerting a substantial control over the nature of the published material and the kind of evidence that reaches it, due to their privileged position as experts in book-writing.

Collins (2000) offers a more empirically grounded, yet reflexive, view of the guru industry by seeking to locate it within the management process, and this in turn within a broader sociological frame. His argument that management fads provide ready-made templates for understanding labour and social life is developed through critical analysis of various fads, including total quality management, reengineering and knowledge management. Collins points out that the problem lies not with buzzwords and jargon in themselves, but rather in their strategic deployment to obscure the highly ideological and empirically questionable assumptions that underlie most popular writing on management. Concerns such as these are more often, however, viewed from the perspective of discourse analysis, to which we now turn.

**1.2.3.2.3 Managerial discourse analysis** While analyses of popular management have often been framed in terms resembling those of discourse —an influential paper by Astley and Zammuto (1992), for example, introduced the Wittgensteinian notion of “language games” to the debate—, specifically discursive concerns have remained limited for the most part. For a large proportion of writers, the analysis of “rhetoric” (or “dramaturgy” Sturdy, 2004, 160) has been confined to the devices for impression management used in popular prose, negatively compared with a scientific ideal of pragmatic communication without rhetoric (e.g., Fincham, 2002; Markham, 1997; Senge and Lim, 1997). Descriptive approaches seeking to draw the processes of knowledge establishment and negotiation into the disciplinary structure, or explain practitioner beliefs and practices by accounting for the presentational techniques used to establish their adequacy, have taken a back seat to largely rationalistic accounts that view the rhetorical factor as an unwelcome distortion of communicative content.

In a nutshell, most of the debate has concerned the relative importance of the rhetorical strategies of knowledge “producers” or “promoters” and the consumption process. Authors focusing on the former have emphasised the success that guru rhetoric has on shaping audience perceptions about credibility and logical consistency. It has been often claimed that analysts of managerial discourse tend to consider readers as meek dupes without any influence over the final reading of these texts and its eventual application (Hilmer and Donaldson, 1996a; Shapiro, 1998). Jackson (1996) and Grint (1997) have made much of this limitation of some accounts making use of what Collins (2001a) terms “the fad motif”, arguing that it is actually the consumers’ perception of their own needs that serves as a guide and target for most management writing. Others have noted that this obscures the power of the audience to resist or recontextualise this rhetoric (Watson, 1995), sometimes seemingly ignoring the limitations imposed by the material to its subsequent reframing.

The debate about duping is interesting not for its assessment of the relative inputs of authors and readers in the communicative exchange or for the details

of its analysis of the process of knowledge creation and transference, but rather for the shrillness and intensity with which accusations of analytical incompetence are made towards other researchers working on the issue. The analysis of Lilley (1997) of the reciprocal and routine chastising that management researchers and managers inflict on each other seems to be equally applicable to the competition between researchers seeking to occupy the theoretical niche of management analysis: ritual claims about lack of subtlety or acumen are often made, and as the exchange between Clark (2004a) and Swan (2004) mentioned *supra* exemplifies, the same arguments are often employed in both sides of the debate, doing little to further analysis. Hackley (2003, 1338) aptly terms this sort of debate “bogus reflexivity”, pointing that they do little to advance the precision of the debate.

Attention has been often brought to the fact that rational analysis of the usefulness of managerial advice is difficult to undertake. We have already seen how accounts of the diffusion of knowledge recognise the importance of this difficulty, and the specific effects that limited information and time for reflection impose on managerial practice. Berglund and Werr (2000) suggest that this lies at the base of the importance that convincing performance has in this type of discourse, both in the personal behaviour of consultants and in the more mediately perceived actions of book authors and the exemplary subjects of management literature. Thus the fascination with stories of corporate heroes, often regarded as charismatic saviours (Khurana, 2002), and other staples of popular management writing such as gnomish workplace parables, first-person war stories and insistent documentation of “best practices”.

Much of the critical literature on popular writing has considered this form of argumentation as simply part of the “glitz and glamour” with which the consulting world dupes managers into dumb acquiescence (Hilmer and Donaldson, 1996b). Studies such as Sturdy (1997) or Huczynski (1993) hold that the rhetorical and cognitive devices employed for legitimating managerial prose are purely symbolic and ritualistic, partaking of the outward appearance of knowl-

edge without any of its rational warrants. On the contrary, Czarniawska and Joerges (1996) holds that fashions coalesce around “master ideas” —much like the tropes of traditional rhetorical and discursive analysis— whose rationality is taken for granted as part of the dominating ideology, and that the success of novel positions depends on their ability to resonate with these. Jackson (2001b) reviewed some of the main managerial texts of the 1990s analysing “fantasy themes” (Bales, 1970; Bormann, 1972), dramatic stories that enact scripts essential to ideological beliefs. Such stories may not necessarily relate to any transactional objective, but nevertheless provide a sense of community and articulate emotions and attitudes. Following Bormann’s claim that three master fantasies undergird contemporary Western outlooks —a *righteous* one, emphasising the technically correct way to do things; a *social* one, emphasising the primacy of human relations; and a *pragmatic* one, founded on the utility and efficiency of practices—, Jackson finds traces of each in three contemporary gurus: Covey (1990), Senge (1990) and Hammer and Champy (1993), respectively.

Alvesson and Deetz (2000, 84) name several strategies by which the implicit beliefs and values particular to a group are strategically promoted: naturalisation, which seeks to present practices or criteria as intimately and invariably linked with the nature of things; universalisation, which seeks to present them as a trait shared by all, even if in different surface forms; instrumentalism, by which all values are narrowly defined in instrumental terms towards a fixed set of goals which subsume them; and hegemony, which seeks to silence or devalue all alternative presentations. Hackley (2003) richly exemplifies the use of these tropes as common-sense principles in marketing texts, which include such claims as marketing being “our economy, our lifestyles, and our physical well being” (1326). Furusten (1999) holds that the rhetoric of management texts tends to present certain relations as “facts”, thus reifying its own assumptions as stable and natural properties of the world. The flat-out, emphatic modality of its definitions seeks to pre-empt challenges.

Other recurring *topoi* include teleological or evolutionary readings, in which

a given form of action is claimed to be the apex of a historical process. Different forms of reasoning may be then used to support the argument that embracing this latest orientation is the only road to success. The urgency of this measures is highlighted through dramatic metaphors of war, violence and purification (Grint and Case, 1998, 561), which echo the heroic representation of corporate leaders already mentioned.

Even researchers not particularly interested in discursive properties have commented on the ambiguity of popular writing. Lewis et al. (2006) note that underspecification in practical recipes is the norm, rather than the exception. Mazza and Álvarez (2000) see it as a fundamental trait in the *prêt-à-porter* discourse of popular management, and both Kieser (1997), and Abrahamson (1996) focus on how formulations remain ambiguous until adapted in the concrete context of practice, pointing that this underspecification may actually be a potent tool in fostering diffusion.

This feature has led to a growing interest in the processes of interpretation and sense-making in organisational behaviour. Hackley (2003, 1332) shows how this debate permeates to the discipline's self-perception, which involves a continuous fluctuation from the disavowal of "theory" in the name of business realism, practical relevance and creative skill—in the well-established tradition of the Harvard Business School—to the acknowledgement that management as a discipline is centred in the production of theoretical models to explain business phenomena, even if these may be intended for eventual practical application. As a result, a number of alternate labels are used for self-description by practitioners that decry "idealistic, ivory-tower...academic views", while lamentations about the decadence of theoretical rigour are commonplace. Nevertheless, the powerful impact of scientific forms is echoed in citation practices that mimic those of academic prose, and in mock concessions aping the mutual recognition at the core of scientific disciplinary practices.

Barley and Kunda (1992, 386) argued that the tension between these contradictory accounts propels management literature in a pendular course between



the extremes of engineering-like rationalism and normative attempts to control inspiration and motivation. The emphasis accorded to one instigates subsequent research in the opposite direction without any sort of *Aufhebung*. Berglund and Werr (2000), on the contrary, seek to show that the two seemingly contradictory currents informing management thought —that based on the “rationality myth” of scientific, generalised method extracted from cumulative investigation of general laws about market and the environment, and that based on the “normative myth” of ad-hoc methods based on local knowledge and personal experience, informed by the personal courage and initiative of leaders— are freely mixed in actual consulting practice, with no apparent ill effects on its perception as a legitimate form of knowledge. This is seen as a result of the need for practices of translation that seek to frame experience in an orderly manner according to the tenets of the shared social knowledge. Nevertheless, they barely touch on the specific traits that distinguish consultancy work or even management theory from other disciplines, and resources for actual discursive investigation unfortunately remain couched in generalising appeals to the authority of Latour’s (1993) theory of modernity.

Jackson (2001b) strikes a similar note by arguing that the appeal of popular management writing lies less in its internal coherence than in its ability to offer an immediately-applicable resource for making sense of the everyday reality of management practice. In his view, consumers do not directly seek models for understanding business and organisational realities as much as packages of practical schemata that can be deployed in managers’ interaction with subordinates, colleagues, customers and stakeholders. Clark and Salaman (1998) view managerial rhetoric as mainly geared towards the construction of an effective “managerial identity”. They hold that popular management books should not be scrutinised on the merits of the windows they open over the nature of organisational phenomena, as a representationalist account of managerial knowledge would claim, but rather as a powerful and unique vehicle for socially constituting managerial identity and business practice, unlike anything that academic writ-

ing on the subject can offer (see also du Gay, 1996; Sahlin-Andersson, 1996). In this vein, Collins (2001a, 30) follows Pruijt (1998) in arguing that the recycling of old ideas may have more consequence than looking merely at its discursive content may suggest: new names, catchwords or mottoes may have a significant effect in mobilising support during the organizational processes associated with the development, elaboration and consumption of managerial initiatives.

It has been noted that linguistic and textually-oriented analyses are in a minority among those defining their object as “management discourse” (Prichard, 2006, 223). The most part of these adopt a broadly Foucauldian perspective that pays little attention to actual language use. Grant and Iedema (2005) argue for a distinction between linguistic-oriented organisational discourse analysis (ODA), and post-structuralist, often normatively-oriented, organisational discourse studies (ODS). While both claim to analyse discourse, the differences in the way they conceive their object are no less pronounced than their similarities. Textually-oriented discourse analysis, while spanning a number of theoretical trends, is globally characterised by a view of discourse as strongly patterned language use in social settings. It analyses concrete tokens of discursive action to gain purchase on the social actions that they perform, thus seeking to identify the regularities that underlie them. In much ODS, however, the notion of “discourse” is employed with exactly the opposite purpose, viewing it as a social formation constructed to maintain a semblance of unity over an organisational reality that is basically shifting, precarious and unfixed. Grant and Iedema classify the latter along five separate dimensions to convey an idea of the available variety.

There are bridges across this divide, however. Among the few discourse analysts of a linguistic persuasion that seem to have been incorporated into ODS are van Dijk (1993b, 1997c, 1998) and Fairclough (1992, 1995, 2003a). This link is not casual. The conception of discourse advocated by these researchers, together with other practitioners of Critical Discourse Analysis, bridges the linguistic and socio-structuring aspects of discursive practice by positing that lan-

guage both indexes and constitutes the social world. While the latter is, at least in part, a discursive construct, subjects face it as a *fait social*, whose immediate structure is impervious to people's knowledge, beliefs or projects for changing it. Processes of organising may be at the core of all social action, imposing a man-made structure over a pliable nature, but the precedence of socially articulated patterns and forces over each individual act has been acknowledged in an effort to provide a fully dialectic or reflexive account of discourse as interaction in society (Fairclough, 2001; van Dijk, 1997b).

In this view, discourse is not located at either side of the agency/structure divide, but rather as a constitutive moment in both. Analyses in this vein benefit from linguistics-based analytical work to make evident how processes of patterning are performed, without thereby risking to unduly fixate these patterns and structures as natural or neglecting the active processes of understanding and contestation that are involved.

Unfortunately, this type of discursive research has only very briefly touched the issue of management knowledge and the several discourse types that have emerged around it, despite its relevance for understanding organisational processes. Analyses of popular management discourse could provide an important insight into the development and shaping of an important resource deployed in organisational processes, and on how it provides managers —those with organisational power— with means to articulate their own view and goals within the setting of the organisation. If all discourse “acts as a powerful ordering force in organizations” (Alvesson and Karreman, 2000, 1127) in that it brings into being categories, frameworks, established objects of knowledge and classificatory systems, popular management discourse occupies a particularly significant part: it explicitly purports to provide legitimate versions of these entities which assume an overt, material character through nominalisation and implementation in powerful discourses. In the creation of meaning through contested interactions among organisational actors (Mumby and Clair, 1997), such an explicitly articulated discursive framework is advantageously positioned and has greater

chances to become the dominant pattern for meaning-making, while alternative discourses are silenced or marginalised. It is, in short, more likely to become “official”, and thus set the scene even for those who seek to challenge it.

Among the few textually-oriented analyses of popular management discourse, the most influential has been that of Chiapello and Fairclough (2002), a joint venture between sociology and CDA laying out a methodology for the linguistic analysis of the new spirit of capitalism. Taking the model of Boltanski and Chiapello (1999) as a point of departure, they argue that the current spirit of capitalism has entailed a growing importance for discourse within social practices, and that texts providing “moral education on business practices” (189) are one of the main avenues for the internalisation of the dominant social order. CDA is seen as an apt tool for analysing how this is built into the semiotic aspects of this order: hegemonic genres (such as popular management books), discourses (such as the representation of globalisation), and styles (such as managerial language, with its buzzwords and its use of metaphor).

These remarks are illustrated through the analysis of a fragment of Kanter (2001), that shows several typical characteristics: a strongly contrastive structure, where polar binary divisions between groups are prevalent; a high epistemic modality, with slight or no hedging of their claims; a marked prescriptive character, with lists and charts helping fixate the proposed interpretation; a moralising and persuasive character seeking to align readers with one of the groups created through discourse. The study is limited, however, by the restricted character of its corpus. As it draws on a single text, it is unable to explore the contrasts and regularities required to develop a genre model. This same limitation afflicts Fairclough (2003b), which offers some further precisions about this endeavour without broadening its empirical basis.

With less theoretical detail, but a similar intent, Webster (2002, 2003) investigates the writing of two Swedish authors strongly inspired by the American model, Nordström and Ridderstråle (2002). His findings can be summarised in three main points: a strong tendency to decouple the formulation of problems

and cases from their historical and social context, avoiding questions about the social justification of corporate activity, the moral status of market economy, the specifics of the managerial outlook or the political technology that sustains and creates the individuals it addresses; an explicit disavowal of intellectual formulas and attitudes, drawing rather on tact, practical skill and sensibility; and a low disciplinary density. In linguistic terms, Webster relates these traits to a lack of modalisation, resorting to concrete examples rather than general rules, frequent exhortations, a prominent and overt positioning of the author within the text, a relative scarcity of intertextual references to similar works, and a shifting lexis.

Thomas (2003) provides one of the few bridges between ODA and ODS. He analyses the processes of discursive establishment of popular texts, assessing the merits and shortcomings of both fashion theory and the neo-institutional approach of Álvarez (1997), and holding that both theories underplay the variety in the actual process of production, consumption and use of management knowledge. In his view, the models offered to account for these are too rigid and downplay the influence that consumers exert over the authors of popular management texts through the transformations they impose on the discursive objects they create. The continuous process of feedback from practice to theory entails that managers and junior consultants do not only fulfil a consumer rôle, but also recreate and reconstitute management knowledge in other settings through their own work.

To address these concerns, he turns to Bernstein's 1996 theory of recontextualisation, that is, the rules which guide the process of linguistic and cognitive formulation of practice as an object of discourse. In each process of recontextualisation, it is the dominant groups that control the communicative situation who establish the appropriate rules for selection in accordance with their interests. From this view, he identifies three main "conjunctures" or social loci where management discourse is passed: academia, the guru press and consultancy and actual practice. While they overlap to some extent, and practitioners

may hold multiple allegiances, they constitute analytically helpful groupings—much more than the simple division between producers and consumers or setters and followers. Academia is distinguished for its allegiance to the discourse of science, be it in its more positivist variant or a less foundationalist yet rigorous engagement with the fact that truth must be deconstructed. The consultancy and guru sector, in contrast, is governed by the notion of efficiency and sellability; Thomas sees it as a result of commodification of discourse (Fairclough, 1996). The need to maintain constant market activity leads actors in this sub-field to create cycles of planned obsolescence for their products, thus giving rise to the fashion industry. Lastly, the conjuncture of practice is less homogeneous, having to do with many different contexts.

Thomas holds that the success of popular texts is in great part due to the flexibility that allows practitioners to deploy them at will in the consultancy and practice fields. Using the writings of Porter (1985, 1990) about “competitive advantage” as an illustration, he contends that the elusive character of the notion—emphatically promoted but ill-defined—served consultants, who could focus on offering competitive advantage as a goal in itself, rather than focusing on the results it was supposed to achieve. Being esoteric yet urgent, it suited the message of salvation that consultants present themselves as bringing. Thus, the nature of the consultancy field promotes the kind of rhetoric and emotion that is strongly dispreferred in the academic conjuncture.

While Thomas’ strictly discursive analysis remains close to features already addressed by other researchers, his view of practice provides a more accurate and complex picture of the dialectic character of discourse. He holds that competitive advantage did not only provide a symbolic framework which managers can use to identify themselves and present a social alignment, but also a tool to wield in the face of reticent actors in the organization itself. The “need” for competitive advantage could be rhetorically deployed towards stakeholders and employees to push for managerial objectives, which tend to be presented as the goals of every member of the institution.

Recontextualisation in interpretive practice can bring about meanings that were absent or actually challenged in the original text. Intertextuality is governed by the principles guiding action in the adopting realm, not necessarily in the originating one, and it is the maintenance of power relations in the former that governs its course (Iedema and Wodak, 1999). The instability of the frontiers between conjunctures makes the discourses in the management field more plastic and “hybrid” than would be the case otherwise. The prestige of science leads practitioners and consultants to draw on the rhetoric of science; at the same time, the concerns with relevance lead academics to bring much of the consultancy side to the mix. In broad terms, Thomas’ argument is that the more practically oriented practitioner-type discourses have effectively colonized the field of management thinking to a large extent.

### **1.3 A critical framework for analysing discourse**

If the term “discourse” seems to appear everywhere in contemporary social and cognitive science, it is in no small degree because it is markedly ambiguous. Under this simple label are in play a wide array of different, mutually irreducible usages. The unwary reader may be tempted to assume that a systematic thread joins them, and seek a common denominator for Michel Foucault’s (1971) critical historiographies of knowledge systems, Erwin Goffman’s (1974) ethnographic reconstruction of the rules of face-to-face interaction, and John Swales’s (1990) description of the systematic regularities in the pragmatic intent of research article introductions, to bring up only three disparate approaches often regarded as discursive.

However, seeking such a unified concept is likely to induce more confusion than clarity; approaches to discourse are based in widely different premises and pursue different goals. In this section, we briefly introduce those premises and goals that fuel the global course of our research. Each chapter devoted to empirical analysis, in turn, will provide further detail on the specific approach

adopted, but the overall frame on which our conception of discourse rests is presented here.

### 1.3.1 The meanings of discourse

Perhaps the closest to a global definition of discourse analysis that can be achieved is the succinct formulation of Stubbs (1983, 1):

Roughly speaking, [discourse analysis] refers to attempts to study the organisation of language above the sentence or above the clause, and therefore to study larger linguistic units, such as conversational exchanges or written texts. It follows that discourse analysis is also concerned with language use in social contexts, and in particular with interaction or dialogue between speakers.

While traditional linguistics stopped its enquiry at the boundaries of the sentence, considering it a complete analytic object (Bloomfield, 1933, 170), discourse analysis<sup>8</sup> protests against the limitations that this canonical version of the discipline imposes. However, there are many ways in which a wider focus may be obtained. One may seek to find the mechanisms by which individual sentences are joined into structured sets of mutually relevant elements, yielding a form of *text linguistics* (de Beaugrande and Dressler, 1981) or *text grammar* (van Dijk, 1972). On a different direction, one may move from the sentence to the concrete situation in which it is uttered, seeing it as an inalienably interactive moment of social action, as is the case in *conversation analysis* (Sacks et al., 1974) or *genre analysis* (Miller, 1984), which share this outlook despite their differences in analytic scope. Linking this situated understanding with the cognitive models underlying its production is the choice of, among others, *discursive psychology* (Billig et al., 1988; Edwards, 1991). Finally, one may veer towards the larger cultural and ideological constructs on which the sentence is premised, which —depending on how closely engaged with specific instances of language use one remains— may yield a semantically informed analysis of ide-



ological representations such as those of Pêcheux (1982), or a more speculative approach such as those prototypically illustrated by Foucauldian archaeology. In this latter version, whose wide influence has perhaps been the main vector for interest in discourse in the social sciences, discourse may mean “the general domain of all statements, a distinct group of statements, or the regulated practice that accounts for some particular statements” (Foucault, 1969, 107, translation ours).

While common elements crop up across diverse research programmes, and a certain family resemblance marks these fields of endeavour, we find it theoretically unsatisfactory to conflate approaches that focus on “something as specific as spoken language, or something as general as the social process of communication” (Lemke, 1995, 6). The multiplicity of sub-disciplines is sometimes bewildering, and it is not our aim here to provide a comprehensive overview of all forms of discourse analysis. Neither do we seek to argue for the primacy of any given approach; the question remains open whether “the vastness and diversity of discourse analysis is a great strength” (Schiffrin et al., 2003b, 5) or a certain degree of disciplinary control is required. Our goal is simply to present the central ideas and disciplinary influences that characterise our version of discourse analysis, and that provide a theoretical justification for its critical bent.

### 1.3.2 Language in use

Our understanding of discourse analysis is rooted in the linguistics tradition, conceiving of discourse as *language in use*. By this we mean an approach to language that is not concerned *per se* with either the formal properties of its systematic structure—as it was in the structuralist paradigm that dominated linguistics for the best part of the 20th century—or the ordered sets of propositions that are conventionally considered to constitute its meaning. Rather, we regard linguistic phenomena (and their equivalents other symbolic systems) as the tangible embodiment of *social action*. Individuals use language in or-

der to make and communicate meaning, often as part of broader social events that encompass more dimensions than the purely linguistic. We see concrete instances or spates of language —text and talk— as the means through which individuals engage each other collaboratively or competitively, position themselves reciprocally and carry out the myriad performances that constitute social life.

Although discourse analysis as we understand it makes use of language as an inroad into understanding social dimensions that are not solely linguistic, it is never detached from an empirical engagement with concrete text and talk. The material with which we work is the complex structure of semiotic properties, from the visual organisation of written text or the aural organisation of spoken talk, to the broader expressive variations that define style and the patterned regularities of genre structure, to the semantic representation of propositions, among many other distinct analytic dimensions. Some of these seek to extend the traditional categories of linguistics beyond the rather arbitrary boundary of the sentence. Thus, for example, we can extend the notion of *speech acts* (Austin, 1971) from a local scope to a broader textual one, and regard a research paper as a macro assertion, or an advertisement as a macro promise of satisfaction (van Dijk, 1977, 238). Some, such as style, rhetoric or schematic form, are very much unlike anything that can happen within the boundaries of the sentence. As we move towards an integrated understanding of broader stretches of discourse, a number of categories emerge from this growing complexity. No single analysis looks at all levels of language organisation, and indeed not all are necessarily relevant for any specific research purpose, but in all cases discourse analysis is concerned with drawing conclusions from the empirically observable formal and functional properties of text.

This notion of discourse as language in use takes up and extends an earlier one of discourse as a structured set of text spanning several sentences that are systematically connected in both syntactic and semantic aspects (Harris, 1952). Analyses of discourse in this sense already hinted at a broader contextu-

alised notion when, in examining how some texts are spontaneously perceived as hanging together coherently, they remarked on the rôle of adjacent language units as the *co-text* necessary for understanding such phenomena as anaphora and ellipsis (Petöfi, 1971). However, early text grammars (e.g., van Dijk, 1972) were mostly devoted to accounting for textual structure, whether in surface linguistic phenomena such as cohesion (Halliday and Hasan, 1976) or in deeper, cognitive-referential dimensions such as coherence (van Dijk, 1980). However, it soon became apparent that non-textual aspects are also essential in understanding meaning-making.

### 1.3.3 Language as text in context

More importantly than broadening the scope of analysis beyond the sentence or incorporating non-textual data, regarding discourse language in use means looking at it as a process— a situated performance undertaken by a socially situated author, in a specific setting governed by local rules and in pursuit of specific goals. In this sense, discourses are not simply complex structures defined by nested layers of formal properties, but also structured forms of social actions. In the felicitous expression of Austin (1971), people *do things with words*— simple things, such as promising, cajoling or persuading, as well as more complex actions where many of these are nested, such as conducting a job interview, requesting a grant for a research project or telling dinnertime stories. At a yet broader level, linguistic actions do work in relation to large-scale individual and social organisation. Job interviews draw upon and enact social beliefs about labour, professional adequacy, workplace power and fairness; justifying or assessing research negotiates a shared view of the means and ends of obtaining knowledge; telling stories at dinner displays the speaker's knowledge of the social standards of propriety and tellability, and helps construct a social face as entertainer and observer.

It is not always clear what may be the proper level of analysis. Some research traditions argue that analysis should proceed from the participant's self-

understanding of the situation as it becomes clear from the micro details of the sociological analysis of single situations of interaction (Schegloff, 1987, 1997). Only the features invoked or oriented to by participants themselves should, in this view, be selected from the many potential descriptions and treated as relevant for analysis. The risk involved in doing otherwise is projecting cultural, ideological or disciplinary biases that have little to do with the event as carried out by participants.

This notion would seem to block off the application of discourse-analytic research to the kind of macro social processes discussed above, as only rarely are participants aware of the institutional and cultural underpinnings of their situated action (Iedema, 2003, 38). Limiting interpretation to the limits imposed by their comprehension adds up to mistaking common sense categories developed to account for the apparent effects of interactional goals and regularities, for exhaustive analytic explanations of the relevant social milieu. If the price to pay for avoiding the undue imposition of *a priori* categories on the linguistic material is not to go beyond what the participants' own awareness, there remains little to be gained from this enquiry.

Moreover, analysis inevitably entails employing the analyst's criteria. Selecting the boundaries of the stretch of talk or the situation of interaction to be analysed, or employing broad notions of preference and relevance to account for the process of turn-taking, both represent unavoidable application of theorists' categories (Wetherell, 1998, 402). Accordingly, other schools within discourse studies argue that the complementary analysis of broader institutional and social processes framing these specific instances of interaction is necessary, including both the analyst's own insight based on cultural familiarity and the data provided by other documents, written or spoken (for a detailed view of the debate, see Billig, 1999a,b; Mey, 2001; Schegloff, 1999; Wetherell, 1998). Scholars in Critical Discourse Analysis have devised systematic methods for collecting the relevant contextual information from a range of sources; the intent is to offset the potential biases introduced by the researcher by triangulating their views

with multiple other sources (e.g., Wodak, 2002).

Early views of the social-linguistic interface skirted the point at issue in these debates —how to bridge the divide between the local level of social situated action, and the global scale where cultural and institutional processes are resolved— by focusing directly on standardised geographic and demographic variables defined prior to engagement with the discourse situation. Thus, variationist sociolinguistics focused on how the origin, position and trajectory of speakers were correlated to linguistic realisation at a range of levels (Labov, 1963), from phonology to syntax and even to broader issues of discourse organisation and semantic generality (Bernstein, 1971). Even as more sophisticated models sought to account for language variation not only on the basis of static sociological categories but also on the kind of activity being accomplished, the independently identifiable character of situational variables remained largely taken for granted. Analyses of *style*, such as that of Crystal and Davy (1969), or *register* as conceived in the systemic-functional framework (Halliday, 1978) viewed activity and setting as dimensions of situational constraint that specify the resources available for communicating in a given situation type and the interpretation to be produced.

Only gradually has the importance of a more sensitive analysis of context been understood. A dynamic conception, moving away from the exogenous determination of social variables to see them as culture-specific and situationally contingent, became illuminated from a number of directions. Cross-cultural research, for example, pointed out that misunderstandings and equivocations often come from interlocutors not sharing a common idea of the features that define and classify a given situation (Tannen, 1993). This suggested that the relevant contextual cues are not unilaterally derived from the objective dimensions of the event, but rather interpretively produced by subjects in socially specific ways. John Gumperz, a key figure in one of the traditions seeking to develop this view, states that:

Linguistic and cultural boundaries are not just ‘naturally’ there,

they are communicatively and, therefore, socially constructed. Thus, they cannot be essentialised and treated as self-contained islands in research on communicative practices. (Gumperz, 1999, 454)

The perspective of *interactional sociolinguistics*, as Gumperz denominated the enquiry on the construction of these practices, led to a view of context as something emergent from participants' inferences about the cues and conventions that they make reciprocally available. Interlocutors conjure a particular version of the social world through the organisation and structure of their communication, and orient—in agreement, challenge or a combination of both—to the version presented by other participants. A key notion in this construction is that of *frames* (Goffman, 1959, 1974, see also Bateson, 1955), routine schemata that actors employ to organise their experience of the world in recognisable patterns of actions and events. As important as the fact that language may be used in potentially unlimited novel combinations is the fact that it is routinely used in well-defined patterns, and that mastering these is a crucial part of fluency in social practice.

### 1.3.4 Creating context in discourse

Framing, however, is an active accomplishment. Actors do significant work to have their actions recognised as befitting a given pattern, or a number of them; they provide *contextualisation cues* (Gumperz, 1999, 461) that enable interpreters to situate interaction in a recognisable space and thus guide the comprehension of the constituent message. A similar perspective is that of *performativity* developed by ethnomethodologists such as Garfinkel (1967, 33), where the organisation of the ongoing situation and the identities of participants are seen as a local accomplishment of participants. Together, these perspectives allow a view of context as a dynamic accomplishment, where background assumptions and implicit inferences are crucial for comprehension (Iedema, 2003, 40). The analytic engagement seeks to reconstruct not only the overt signals

purposively deployed by participants, but also the internalised schemata at the boundaries of perception that govern attribution and evaluation.

Ethnographic research on the pragmatics of discourse has shown that most of this reflexive framing is *non-referentially indexical*; that is, it does not depend on the explicit content of text and talk but rather on the assumptions about the social identity of the speaker and the social nature of the communicative situation that are inferred from features that do not contribute to the literal meaning of the asserted propositions (Ochs, 1992, 338). Knowledge about these indexes is not always consciously available to interlocutors, but may be pursued by other means to ensure a more accurate interpretation (Hymes, 1980, 92).

The effect of linguistic action in *creating* a context for interpretation can be regarded at different levels of amplitude as well. In a local scope, metapragmatic phenomena help produce an ongoing interaction according to a given frame (Verschuere, 2004). On a wider one, discursive action also helps shape how the different social groups in interaction perceive their own performances, what assessment they make of the broader social processes as a whole, and how they go about determining the relevant canons for legitimate action. That is, discourse uses specifically semiotic resources to *transform* social practice, by producing a range of practical effects that do not always simply reproduce the pre-existing system of orientations and possibilities (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999). From this point of view, discourse is both situated and situating, dialectically embedded in wider processes of affiliation, conflict and collaboration at a social level. As Johnstone (2002, 9; for an alternative summary, see Fairclough and Wodak, 1997) succinctly describes it:

1. Discourse is shaped by the world, and discourse shapes the world.
2. Discourse is shaped by language, and discourse shapes language.
3. Discourse is shaped by participants, and discourse shapes par-

ticipants.

4. Discourse is shaped by prior discourse, and discourse shapes the possibilities for future discourse.
5. Discourse is shaped by its medium, and discourse shapes the possibilities of its medium.
6. Discourse is shaped by purpose, and discourse shapes possible purposes.

This broadly *social constructivist* outlook on the relation between discourse and social life has strongly influenced analyses in many fields. Research on scientific knowledge and practice, for example, has

shown how justification, proof, interest or relevance are all developed in linguistic interaction, whose conventional patterns and generic structure selectively enable meanings on the basis of the shared beliefs and habits of the community (Bazerman, 1989; Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1994). As “nature has no language in which she can speak to us on her own behalf” (Toulmin, 1972, 246), all observation and theorising takes place in linguistic media that are essentially social. The process of producing and validating knowledge bears the imprint of the institutions that are socially entitled with the power to do so.

### 1.3.5 Critical Discourse Analysis

While the question of power is unavoidable in researching language in social life, and crops up in various forms in different traditions, *Critical Discourse Analysis* (CDA) is the conventional designation for a cluster of approaches that make this its main focus. Their common thread is the investigation of “the role of discourse in the (re)production and challenge of dominance” (van Dijk, 1993b, 249); however, many different research traditions have converged in CDA, from the initial constitution of a core group of scholars in the early 1990s to this day. This is not the place to provide a detailed account of this process (the interested reader is referred to the discussions in Blommaert and Bulcaen, 2000;



Caldas-Coulthard and Coulthard, 1996; Meyer, 2002b; Wodak, 2004), but it is important to note that the lack of a theoretical common ground makes it difficult to perceive these works as a unitary contribution to the comprehension of the linguistic aspects of social life.

Some authors have held that theoretical discussions should be distinguished from the adoption of an explicitly critical attitude (van Dijk, 2002), and others have positively welcomed methodological diversity (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999). Nevertheless, a certain programmatic definition of the movement has been evident, as in the selective choice of antecedents and parallels (Blommaert and Bulcaen, 2000, 454). Billig (2003) has asked whether the institutionalisation of the label, despite the plurality of methods and outlooks it encompasses, is actually helpful for the critical intent. In a similar vein, Widdowson (1998) has questioned the pertinence of marking a strict divide between critical and non-critical approaches. The relationship between power structures and discourse structures is doubtlessly a complex one, and analysis may address itself to many different components.

Norman Fairclough (2000b, 2001) proposes a blueprint for discourse-oriented critique based on a three-dimensional framework of discourse. The function of discourse within social practices is seen as highly variable, and cannot be established prior to situated analysis. However, very broadly it figures in three aspects of activity. The first dimension is discourse as part of the social activities, meaning that actions are accomplished in a partly discursive manner; writing papers, referral letters and grant proposals, for example, is an essential part of scientific practice. Socially typified conventions for the semiotic performance of action are the basis of *genres* (Miller, 1984), and a crucial element in understanding the dimensions of language traditionally ascribed to pragmatics.

The second dimension is discourse as part of socially constructed identities, a theme dear to linguistic anthropology as well. Using language in a certain way indexes aspects of a social persona, from geographical origin to professional rôle, as well as individual traits of personality; in turn, this positions the speaker

in a certain intended relationship with other participants, close or distant, formal or relaxed. This indexing often functions in layered relationships, directly signalling local traits such as affect or stance, and indirectly evoking broader characterisations (Ochs, 1990). Thus, affecting frankness and directness may be resources in constructing an identity as a reliable business partner. These conventional projections are semiotically constructed as *styles*.

The third dimension is the one most broadly associated with language, as part of the social production of representations. Discourse provides the mean for articulating a communicable model of the different elements in social life, including —reflexively— the practice being currently undertaken. Representations label, describe, categorise and schematically organise the diverse parts of the social world. They are never a straightforward reflection; representing involves selectively foregrounding, matching and contextualising elements in a discursive construct, as well as establishing normative ideas of how things should be and predicting how they will develop. Conventionalised representations are —somewhat confusingly— also called *discourses*, with the plural indicating that multiple positions are simultaneously possible for understanding experience.

Social practices that routinely take place in complementary or integrated sets form social orders: institutions, organisations, fields of interrelated activity. The semiotic aspect of these orders of practice is capital D discourse, or “discursive order”. It encompasses the structured totality of the discursive practices within a domain of social life, in all three of these dimensions: not only the representations that circulate in it, but also the range of genres in which this representation is enacted and the social identities that it indexes and inculcates. The pragmatic effect of these orders is made tangible when these representation become materialised in social arrangements that are not solely linguistic, both incorporated —generic scripts that organise action, and identities shaped in accordance with them— and objectivated —laws, business procedures, tools, etc. Representations are also *recontextualised* in further discourses, which may in turn become the object of enactment and inculcation. This recontextualisation

is never a straightforward process of acceptance, as individuals may selectively ignore, challenge or appropriate discourses according to their own goals and to the opportunities for creative transformation that their own milieu offers. Understanding the effects of a given discourse thus requires an engagement with the processes of its active reception in various locales and an empirical approach to its contingent outcomes.

This approach leads to a triple view of critique. *Ideological critique* — sometimes confusingly defined as concerned with “the effects of discourse on social structures of power” (Fairclough et al., 2004, 2)— focuses on how representations of a social order are incomplete, biased or contradictory. *Rhetorical critique* analyses how persuasive intent affects sound argumentation. Finally, *strategic critique* zooms in to the performative effects of discourses as they are deployed within networks of practice in order to achieve specific social effects. Fairclough (2003b) argues that this form of analysis gives the required grounding to the critical intent, by providing a concrete focus for analysis in terms of the specific links through which the enactment of representations is performed. Wodak (2006) presents a similar framework, distinguishing an *immanent* level of discourse critique, a *socio-diagnostic* critique aimed at uncovering its manipulative character, and a *prospective* critique that seeks to intervene in a practical dimension, effecting a transformation in the range of available resources.

Orders of discourse function in this model as the overall mediating device between processes and structures of power on one hand, and semiotic properties on the other. There is considerable obscurity, however, on the matter of the cognitive processes involved in the appropriation and transformation of representations, and on the means through which they appear persuasive and become incorporated into the subjective definition of the self. Fairclough (1989, 24) makes use of the notion of *members’ resources*, internalised schemata about linguistic performance and devices, the genres they employ, and the social practices prevalent in the world they inhabit. These are simultaneously cognitive and social entities, but Fairclough’s concern is mainly with their socially-developed

dimension (Stockwell, 1999, 513). Chilton (2005, 24) emphatically notes that any attempt to pass from description to explanation and (potentially) transformation involves dwelling on the process by which such resources are cognitively appropriated and transformed.

Cognitive work in Critical Discourse Analysis has been mainly carried out by van Dijk (1993b, 1997a, 1999, 2005, 2006b), continuing his earlier work on the psychology of text processing. In his view, power figures broadly in two ways in discursive interaction. At a rather overt level, the enactment of power in social terms is realised in differential access to valued resources; these include discursive resources, such as the right to meaningfully participate in certain genres and fields, occupy certain channels and exercise control over the norms and the contextual embedding of text and talk. Powerful participants not only reach communicative positions not available to others, but also are entitled to determine the legitimate content and organisation of those events in which they share the floor with others. This control can be distinguished in the interactive devices used to police discursive performance, directing other participants, informing them of the norms or suppressing deviation, but often remains largely invisible, as it has become internalised to such extent that people spontaneously accommodate to it (van Dijk, 2003, 355).

This accommodation is evidence of a second effect of power, which is mediated through cognition (van Dijk, 1989), more specifically *mental models*. Models are complex representations of events and situations, schematically organised in categories that represent the admissible and relevant elements that enter into their composition, and individually created as a means to collate in a structured manner all available knowledge about an event (van Dijk and Kintsch, 1983). Although individual, they feed on shared representations about nature and culture, common experiences of social arrangements, and conventional forms of linguistic and mental operation. Powerful discourse acts through the management of cognition, as ideas, values and norms are invariably expressed and shared through discourse. Singular and local models are abstracted into general

knowledge; in turn, this may be applied by instantiating some of its elements in concrete models.

The critical analysis of discourse is concerned, thus, with how specific discourse structures affect the formation of mental models. Of particular importance in this regard are *context models* (van Dijk, 1997a), reflexive if often unconscious representations of the communicative event where interlocutors and contextual elements are related and characterised. That is, context affects discourse production and comprehension only insofar as it is mediated by a subjective representation of its relevant features. This prism is strongly influenced by *ideologies*, which are societally shared belief systems of rather broad character that organise group membership, interaction and values. As systematic constructs that are taken for granted within a group, even if contested in interaction with other communities, ideologies are both cognitive and social, establishing patterns for meaning-making that result in conflicting versions of social reality.

Critique, in these terms, can also be carried out in several dimensions. As models govern not only text comprehension but also text production —guiding the author in the selection of the material than needs to be explicitly asserted and structuring its deployment in order to fit the assumed beliefs of the foreseen audience—, texts built on biased models may be designed so as to difficult or preclude comprehension by those who do not share these beliefs. Secondly, by constructing texts that require the acceptance of certain ideological beliefs for their adequate comprehension or use, authors may manipulate audiences into accepting them as their own. The exclusion of forms of knowledge that the audience possesses from the cognitive models underlying discourse may lead to a dislodging of these beliefs from public esteem, selectively legitimating certain outlooks on the social world (van Dijk, 2005, 88).

## 1.4 Our corpus

In a previous section, we noted that previous discursively-oriented work on popular management was seriously limited in its scope, often dealing with fragments with single texts. Overcoming this limitation entails building an adequately representative corpus, where the different programmes and styles that articulate divisions within the field are duly acknowledged. This is seldom an easy task, and even less when no institutional umbrella polices the entry of new contributors. We now turn to a discussion of the operative decisions that led to the construction of the corpus employed in this study. The principles underlying the design of a research corpus in general terms are not discussed, assuming that the issues of size, representativeness, balance, level of detail and context are sufficiently well established in the specialised literature (see Biber et al., 1998; McEnery and Wilson, 1996, for an extended discussion). We first present the peculiarities involved in the construction of this particular corpus, due to the nature of the texts involved; following this, we provide some of its quantitative properties.

### 1.4.1 Selection of the sample

The selection of a corpus of works for textual analysis involves not only substantive criteria, such as theoretical relevance or representativeness, but also practical considerations about sample size, availability for collection and ease of storage and manipulation. All of these feature prominently in the design of research on popular management texts, since —unlike better known fields and genres— no pre-compiled corpora are available. The effort of circumscribing the field and sampling representative materials therefore lies entirely on the researcher.

### 1.4.2 Identifying popular management texts

The choice of popular material rather than academic publications is imposed by the nature of the field. Even though scholarly materials are easier to identify and label—since the editorial committees of journals and publishing houses serve as gatekeepers, enforcing a certain degree of uniformity and normalising disciplinary boundaries—, they would provide a significantly biased image of the concerns of practitioners. The report of Svejnova and Álvarez (1999) for the CEMP project noted that the topics and theoretical focus of scholarly publications on management often trailed behind their popular counterparts, following them rather than opening new avenues for research. Barley et al. (1988) employed more sophisticated methods, including an analysis of the textual properties of published writing, to examine the patterns of mutual influence in both types of materials; they found that academics tended to adopt the models of popular writers much more frequently than the converse. In an influential critique of business scholarship, Pfeffer and Fong (2002) argued that academic research exerts little influence, if any, over actual managerial practices; using various techniques, including the analysis of sales and citation practices, they demonstrated that not only non-academic books are consumed much more widely than academic publications, but also that tools and frameworks of non-academic origin are more often employed and better received in corporate settings than those coming from business schools.

It is no simple task to establish what is a popular management text, however. Journals addressed to academics and practitioners sometimes show readily identifiable differences in article length, design and focus, but these are by no means universal. For many years now, trade journals in management have shown “a majority of the writing [that] is serious and sometimes scholarly”, but written by in-house staff, with no peer review, and catering to immediate practical needs rather than to the accumulation of reliable research data (Thompson, 1962, 366); this continuity does not seem to have diminished, as assessments of current trends about knowledge flow indicate (Gosain et al., 1997). In the

case of books, the lack of apparent formal criteria is even more pronounced. Many popular texts are published by business school presses, and authored by scholars with intimate ties to academia (Huczynski, 1993). Discursive differences, such as the presence of formalised citations, are seldom clear enough to unambiguously locate a text in either camp.

Moreover, we have already noted in Section 1.2 that a clear-cut definition of the contents of management is hardly available. Management is a fuzzy term, imperfectly institutionalised and lacking many of the formal properties and the conventional controls marking the boundaries of better established academic disciplines. Choosing any specific set of epistemic criteria to circumscribe the choice of material is therefore highly arbitrary. Fernández Rodríguez (2004, 171), for example, excepted materials on marketing from his survey of popular management texts, while other authors consider them an essential part of the field (e.g. Álvarez et al., 1999). Adopting either choice on conceptual grounds may distort the representativeness of the results in unpredictable ways by projecting the author's preconceptions of the field into the construction of the research object. Indicating the prototypical traits of a textual category, as suggested by Swales (1990), is difficult enough for well-researched genres. For complex and perhaps heterogeneous ones such as popular management texts, it is *a fortiori* impossible.

### 1.4.3 Sampling through insider criteria

A way out of this dilemma is the use of emic criteria of representativeness and relevance— that is, criteria expressed and described in terms meaningful to their users, rather than by any externally-imposed framework. By choosing texts that practitioners themselves have found fitting with their taxonomies and interests, researcher bias is at least partially controlled. In an emic approach, the limits of management as a cultural category are inferred from the practical judgements of the involved actors; at least at this stage in the analysis, they are an already given *fait social*, not a problematic object. Boltanski and Chiappello (1999),



for example, adopted a similar strategy when they collected texts on “moral education on business practices” using the categories employed by French trade journals. Of course, such a purposive sampling strategy is not reliable for drawing formal inferences about the statistical properties of the target population, but proportional samples are rarely useful or applicable for building language corpora in any case (Biber et al., 1998, 247).

A possible means for assessing emic relevance in a disciplinary setting is sales volume. While it is impossible to assess the degree to which a text is followed in practice from the number of copies sold, it doubtlessly serves as a measure of the interest it has garnered from the audience. This is the method used by several studies on management discourse, such as Lewis et al. (2006) and Pfeffer and Fong (2002). Given that the nature of popular publications precludes the establishment of the formal criteria for disciplinary admissibility typical in peer-reviewed or edited professional journals, market success seems a good candidate for a proxy to select typically interesting texts from within the wealth of publications devoted to the matter. Nevertheless, the latter acknowledge some objections that may be raised against such a characterisation, especially that influence may be under-represented by foregoing the analysis of the influence a book may have had in other publications. Texts may be influential, yet little-read, if they serve as the basis and source for eventual vulgarisations or presentations in other formats, such as the seminars, training programmes and executive summaries often preferred by managers (Pagel and Westerfelhaus, 1999). Conversely, books may be widely sold but only partially read, as Crainer (1996, 49) claims about Peters & Wakeman’s *In Search of Excellence*.

Pfeffer and Fong (2002) employ an alternate measure of relevance, using explicit judgements of value issued by prestigious media to assess the disciplinary influence of a set of management texts. They rely on the recommended book lists published by *BusinessWeek*, a McGraw-Hill-published magazine generally considered the leading periodical in the sector. After reviewing other approaches, such as the concession of academic awards and empirical analyses

of the actual application of business methods, they conclude that the consumer recommendations in *BusinessWeek* are a good index of the impact of management theories. There are doubtlessly biases and peculiarities in the selections effected by the magazine's editors, but its dominant position ensures that it fits with the standard expectations for the genre, providing a more reliable fit than the educated intuition of an analyst often attracted precisely by the atypical character of some texts.

#### 1.4.4 A useful sample: recommendations from *BusinessWeek*

Following the example of Pfeffer and Fong, we decided to use the list of Best Business Books published by *BusinessWeek* as a source for building our corpus.

The magazine regularly runs columns on recommended readings, both authored by staff writers and contributed by outside experts —CEOs, consultants and professors. Book reviews are an important feature of both the print and the online editions; in the latter, they are complemented by additional, consumer-contributed reviews in the spirit of the so-called “Web 2.0” (O'Reilly, 2007). Paying subscribers also have access to executive book summaries authored by the specialist company Soundview, condensing in a few thousand words current books deemed of importance and interest, with lists covering the main points and highlighting practical recommendations. All in all, advice on reading is a prominent feature of the guidance that the magazine offers to its consumers, on par with suggestions for choosing a business school, defining an investment strategy, and interpreting the economic news.

As an extraordinary supplement, however, *BusinessWeek* has compiled in two occasions the recommendations of a number of figures in the field to build extensive reading lists, touted as the “Best Business Books” the reader could find. The earliest of the two, in 2000, contained 114 recommendations from an array of “prominent professors and business professionals”, including academics from twelve different business schools, chief officers from various companies —

including Fortune 500 ones, such as Procter & Gamble, America Online and Amazon—, consultants and business book authors. The second, issued in 2003, was described in similar terms, but the 30 experts consulted were all business school professors. The exact terms of the request are not available, but according to the introductory description, they were asked about “their favorite books, business or otherwise”, “[w]hat made those books inspirational, instructive, or influential in their thinking and their careers?” and “[w]hat would they advise [the *BusinessWeek* reader] to read if [they] had the chance to ask them?”. The recommendations, unsurprisingly, were overwhelmingly of a professional nature, although some fiction and non-business focused books were included.

The broader scope of the earliest list made it more attractive as a cross-section of the reading preferences of leading figures in the field, and the decision was taken to use it as a basis for compiling a corpus for analysis. The scholarly slant of the participants in the latter one would have perhaps yielded a more conservative selection. Items in the list were identified in detail by the standard bibliographic traits, collated and retrieved. A full listing is available in Appendix B.

This list contains 143 recommendations for a total of 114 distinct items, of which all but one are books. The remaining is a recommendation for an academic journal, which —being incommensurable with the remaining texts— was not included in subsequent analyses. The number of recommendations per consulted professional varied greatly, from 1 to 10, with an mean of 5.11. No significant statistical differences were evident if recommendations from academics and practitioners were distinguished, although the relatively reduced size of the corpus makes significant differences of this kind unlikely. There was some repetition in recommendations, with twenty-four books being mentioned more than once, and eight authors having more than one book recommended. Tables 1.1 and 1.2 show these exceptionally frequent items.

The books in this corpus cannot be said to be representative of all current trends in popular management texts, let alone of the discipline as a whole. Not

<b>Book</b>	<b>Citations</b>
<i>Information Rules</i> (Shapiro & Varian)	5
<i>Competing for the Future</i> (Hamel & Prahalad)	3
<i>The Innovator's Dilemma</i> (Christensen)	3
<i>Built to Last</i> (Collins & Porras)	2
<i>Competitive Advantage</i> (Porter)	2
<i>Competitive Strategy</i> (Porter)	2
<i>Co-opetition</i> (Brandenburger & Nalebuff)	2
<i>Crossing the Chasm</i> (Moore)	2
<i>Experiential Marketing</i> (Schmitt)	2
<i>In Search of Excellence</i> (Peters & Waterman)	2
<i>Leadership is an Art</i> (DePree)	2
<i>Management Challenges for the 21st Century</i> (Drucker)	2
<i>Morgan</i> (Strouse)	2
<i>New Rules for the New Economy</i> (Kelly)	2
<i>On Leadership</i> (Gardner)	2
<i>Out of the Crisis</i> (Deming)	2
<i>Renewable Advantage</i> (Williams)	2
<i>The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People</i> (Covey)	2
<i>The Dilbert Principle</i> (Adams)	2
<i>The Leadership Engine</i> (Tichy)	2
<i>The Lexus &amp; the Olive Tree</i> (Friedman)	2
<i>The New New Thing</i> (Lewis)	2
<i>The Soul of a New Machine</i> (Kidder)	2
<i>Unleashing the Killer App</i> (Downes & Mui)	2

Table 1.1: Most cited books

<b>Author</b>	<b>Different books</b>	<b>Citations</b>
Peter Drucker	4	5
Michael Porter	3	5
Clayton Christensen	2	4
Adrian J. Slywotzky	2	2
B. Joseph Pine II	2	2
Geoffrey Moore	2	2
John P. Kotter	2	2
Warren Bennis	2	2

Table 1.2: Authors with more than one recommended book

Average	1990.658
Median	1996
Mode	1999
Std. dev.	12.268
Minimum	1938
Maximum	2000

Table 1.3: Date of publication of texts in corpus

only does the sampling procedure make it impossible to control the relevant variables, but the exploratory nature of this study means there is no previous estimate of the characteristics of the overall population or their relative importance for the prototypical definition of the genre, if such a thing exists. Even if it did, it is hardly evident at what distance from the centre do exemplars become insufficiently characteristic to merit inclusion.

Formal characteristics are of little use. While most of the books in this list were published by business school presses or in specialised collections, a number of them do not answer to any intuitive notion of a management book. Several books of fiction are included, and while some of them —such as Eliahu Goldratt’s *The Goal*— are part of the fringe genre of management narrative (Boje, 2001), others are regular novels or narrative poems, included probably for the epic, motivational character of the deeds they tell. Works from disciplines other than management appear as well, although all bear a close relation to managerial concerns: *Money and Motivation*, edited by W. F. Whyte, is a classic of industrial sociology, but concerns the very managerial problem of the effectiveness of wage incentives for productivity, while *The Social Psychology of Organizations* by Katz & Kahn applied the kind of systems theory later developed by Luhmann to the psychological explanation of organisational dynamics. There is a strong skew favouring contemporary publications: the earliest book in the sample is Drucker’s 1938 *The Functions of the Executive*, but the average date of publication is 1991. Table 1.3 summarises the main statistical properties of this variable.<sup>9</sup>

The analyses in the subsequent chapters will make the diversity in these texts

sufficiently clear. It can be said, however, that these texts are indicative of the diversity of textual and contextual characteristics of works that have influenced management. While research on practitioner judgements—either ethnographic or quantitative—may help better define the distinctive traits of these texts, it lies beyond the scope of this project.

Copies of all of these works were obtained, and their data compared with the original bibliographic information, noting any discrepancies. After an initial reading of the entire text, samples from each were converted to electronic format for ease of parsing and processing. The texts were scanned and processed with OCR software to obtain a text version, which was then checked by the researcher against the original copy for scanning errors and other problems. The files were then given names based on the author and date of publication; these names were used for ease of identification, but are not reflected in the published analyses.

The use of a text format allowed automatic parsing, but forced the removal of the visual representation of data and concepts. As none of the studies relied on such information for interpretation, the loss of this semiotic information was judged acceptable. However, the content of charts and tables was reproduced in tabular form in the body text, and the location of removed equations, figures and plates was marked.

As only sections were digitised and this information is not readily available for printed matter, we cannot offer statistics for word counts in the corpus. Variation in length was in any case easily perceivable; the texts ranged from the 96 pages of Johnson's *Who Moved My Cheese?* to the 1'008 of *Strategic Management of Technology and Innovation*. There is no simple correlation between the degree of specialisation and length; many of the longer books are fiction, biography or popularisation. Some statistical properties are listed in Table 1.4. Differences in typesetting and layout make page number an unreliable indicator of the exact word count, but the significant differences within the corpus are readily evident.

Average	354.518
Median	320
Mode	272
Std. dev.	157.225
Minimum	96
Maximum	1'008

Table 1.4: Length of texts in corpus (in pages)

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>The classification expounded below draws significantly from that of Sturdy (2004), which however failed to distinguish critical from uncritical assessments.

<sup>2</sup>A succinct yet solid explanation can be found in Scott (2000); the extensive literature on the matter has been scarcely quoted by the analysts of management knowledge diffusion.

<sup>3</sup>Studies in the indirect effects of control systems date back to the much-debated *Hawthorne effect* of Mayo (1933). Draper (2006) discusses implications at some length.

<sup>4</sup>It is important to note, however, that so-called rational models actually adopt a rather more limited notion of rationality than is required by the rational choice theory they endorse. In its broader sense, the claim they make is trivially true: actors choose their course of action on the grounds of what they think is best given their own specific situation and the set of goals they are committed to; it may be equally said, conversely, that their choice of a course effectively indexes their perception of their situation and the goals they pursue. However, difficulties are evident as soon as any kind of specific content is ascribed to this formal relation and constraints are imposed on the kind of data that is to be considered meaningful for making these choices. The assessment of what counts as rational behaviour in a given situation cannot be derived directly from external reality; rather, it is crucially dependent on the choice of a model for establishing relations from a finite number of empirical observations and general rules and conceptions about the world— what has come to be called, in the wake of the influential work of Kuhn (1962), a *paradigm*.

Much of the disagreement about managerial action does not concern rationality in its broad sense, but rather the specific choices made to determine what is to be considered rational argument for establishing it. Thus, the call for rational “testing” of the relations between management theories and corporate performance voiced by studies such as Staw and Epstein (2000) loses much of its thrust by the observation that the theoretical framework necessary for such an evaluation is unlikely to be agreed upon by the dissenting bodies of practitioners, gurus and scholars. Moreover, the scholarly consensus often explicitly adopts the view that the only constraints and benefits that should be observed are those concerned with the maximisation of profit or production. From a descriptive point of view, for example, psychodynamic models that explain the adoption of theories and models as surcease for the anxiety and uncertainty faced by managers are perfectly rational ones, taking into account that these psychological needs may perfectly well be instrumentally-evaluated elements in the managerial set of preferences —and thus “rational” in the terms of rational choice theory, which expressly does not concern itself with any analysis of the inherent or general desirability of actors’ preferences (Cox, 2004). It adopts a completely different character, however, when it normatively conceives these preferences as emotional deviations from a “rational” —in a very different sense— ideal of psychological maturity, as in entailed in the wish of Abrahamson (1991) for techniques to provide “immunity” from psychological pressure.

The implicit premise of much of this reasoning is that choice modelled on profit-maximising practices is in fact rational *tout court*, and that individual, social and “rational” reasons for decision can be neatly separated. Its ability to accurately represent the actual practice is impaired by projecting upon them the presuppositions about what is “rational” drawn from the specific repertoire of one of the actors in the field, management intelligentsia; by virtue of a kind of “spontaneous Hegelianism” (Bourdieu, 2001), it proves what it sets out to prove only at the price of proving unsatisfying and inconclusive in the controversy with upholders of a different paradigm.



<sup>5</sup>A common criticism raised against Neo-institutional theory questions the extent to which this normality is actually present; see, for example, Kondra and Hinings (1998).

<sup>6</sup>Clark (2004b) has correctly addressed an important limitation of this data: an exclusive concern with citation, which obscures the actual use of the data, and a complete disconnection with the flow of these ideas in practice and non-indexed publications; the persistence of theories or practices under renewed names, which Benders and van Veen (2001) hold to be significant, has also been ignored in this methodology.

<sup>7</sup>However, the interest of this work does not come from its fragmentarily radical theoretical framework, largely inspired by Guy Debord (1967) and holding an unacknowledged debt to the theory of simulacra of Baudrillard (1981), but rather in spite of it. The main thrust of Clark and Greatbatch's argument addresses the alleged prevalence of fabricated spectacles —“pseudoevents” or “synthetic products”— that seek to appear as faithful representations of reality itself, while drawing their appeal from careful construction by specialists. The epistemological naïveté with which they misread Debord by equating mediation, which lies the basis of all human action and thought, with falsehood, is a bad example of the usually sophisticated analyses in CMS. Fortunately, this does not mar the evidence adduced to show that the editorial process in the production of management texts is not simply a repackaging of previously-existing ideas. To a large extent, it is a substantial reformulation of its significance and gist in accordance to the specific rules of a different field—for example, the use of stories as communicative devices, or the focus on “best practices” of well-known companies to attract attention.

<sup>8</sup>The arguments in this section are framed in terms of language and linguistics simply because the present research has dealt with linguistic materials only. Text and talk have been the object of most research of this kind, but in principle, there is no question of primacy that should lead one to analyse language in preference to other semiotic modes, such as typography, music or painting—

although the analytic toolbox is likely to be widely different for each of these. Significant advances in the development of a multi-modal semiotic analysis can be found in the work of Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), among others.

<sup>9</sup>The *Odyssey* was excluded from this analysis, being an obvious outlier.

## Chapter 2

# Titling practices

This chapter seeks to explore title writing practices in books about management and business written for a popular audience. The specific semantic and pragmatic strategies employed by authors in designing their titles are examined to provide an insight on the wider processes of knowledge formulation, legitimation and diffusion that take place in the particular disciplinary context.

A long established prescriptive tradition holds that titles should be informative. While there can be little doubt that conveying information about the attached text is one of the crucial functions of titles, this dictum has traditionally been interpreted in the narrow sense that titles should convey the gist of the text's topic, that is, its macro semantic content. In this strong form, the principle of informativeness is much less tenable than it seems at first sight. It implicitly subscribes a view of text as a reflection of independently-existing truths and theories, detaching it from the specific contexts of production and practice that may have given rise to it. Thus, it assumes that all communication is based on a previous objective understanding of what the world is like.

We argue that this account of titles, despite its theoretical elegance, fits ill with actual titling practices. Titles can be better understood from a constructivist point of view, where writing is seen as embedded in the pragmatic context of disciplinary practices that cover the elaboration, justification, diffusion

and application of knowledge. The “things” that texts report can have different meanings for subjects with different goals and interests. Titling practices reflect these contexts in various manners, both by selectively framing the information according to the relevant models, and metadiscursively contributing to context models describing the identity of the participants, their goals and the situation of communication.

We apply this account of titles to an examination of titling practices in popular management books. This kind of literature, seeking to provide practical recipes for organizational performance and business success, has been the object of much controversy in academic circles. The often figurative and emotionally charged language of these texts —and their titles— has been argued to be an integral part of the “glitz and glamour” with which the consulting world dupes managers into dumb acquiescence (Hilmer and Donaldson, 1996b). We seek to explain these features instead as suited to the specific context in which these books are read and employed, which is widely different from that of academic communication. While there is no shortage of reasons to critique the ideology and practical recipes offered in popular management writing, facile criticism relying on a blunt contrast between “science” and “rhetoric” fails to address the true nature of the problem.

## 2.1 Titles as text and discourse

The importance of titles for the understanding of text has been long acknowledged; in the words of Swales (1990, 224), “titles consist of only a few words, but they are serious stuff”. Although a general theory of titles unifying the insights of cognitive psychology, applied linguistics, literary theory and discourse analysis is yet missing (James, 1990; Soler, 2007), there has been no shortage of advice on the matter. Most of the literature on titles in scientific and technical writing has considered them as an ideal, concise summary of the text’s overall meaning. In an often quoted piece of advice, Day (1968, 15) states that

titles should consist of “the fewest possible words that adequately describe the content of the paper” (cfr. Turk and Kirkman, 1981).

### 2.1.1 Titles as miniatures of the text

This emphasis on summarising seems to have informed both empirical research and prescriptive discussion, to the point that these strands are not always easily separated. Thus, Hartley (2005) reviews previous research on the function and structure of titles with the explicit goal of supporting his thesis that titles “*should be* informative” (203, emphasis ours). Goodman et al. offer a descriptive study of titles in medicine research articles, but admonish readers that the purpose of a title “*should be* to convey effectively the topic of the report and the design of the reported investigation while attracting the attention of and informing the primary target audience, editors, and reviewers” (2001, 75, emphasis ours). Their conclusions and suggestions are premised on this principle.

Haggan (2004) seems to adopt a broader view, acknowledging that titles may serve various pragmatic functions: “to provide an initial introduction, to attract attention, to inform, and sometimes to startle” (294). Her subsequent discussion, however, neatly separates the “bare presentation of facts” (300) and “straightforward presentation of information” (313) of what she terms the scientific style, from titling practices in literary theory and, to a lesser degree, linguistics. The latter she considers imprecise, “flirtatious” and even obfuscatory in their departure from the reproduction of textual content. Her view is that true scientific goals are best served by precision and explicitness, and deviations from this norm are attributed to a “fascination with language” (301) that linguists and creative writers share.

While no-one but the staunchest idealist would object to the notion that titles, together with the associated text, point to an account of a world that lies beyond language itself, it is instructive to notice that a focus on language is here seen as an obstacle to the process of scientific communication. While Haggan describes in detail strategies for priming the readers’ attention and interest in

literary titles, the features of scientific prose are explained solely by the need to inform. This carries the echoes of an early typology by Crosby (1976, 387ff), who presented a five-fold classification of titles: (a) those that describe the broad subject; (b) those that focus on the specific topic; (c) those that present the motivating question; (d) those that announce the thesis; and (e) those that bid for the readers' attention. As it seems clear that attention-seeking is transversal to the remaining strategies and compatible with any of them, it seems difficult to justify such an inconsistent model unless by reference to the century-old ideology that asserts the impersonality of a scientific practice consisting in an "unmediated encounter with nature" (Myers, 1990, 189). Language is here simply a tool to transmit truths and theories that exist independently of their communication— an unavoidable wrapping that works best when it is at its most transparent.

This strong dualism sharply contradicts the established fact that the rhetorical practices involved in scientific research are subject to social and historical variation, simply because knowledge is always embedded in a cultural matrix that provides a shared set of assumptions and a pragmatic context for reporting and persuasion (Hyland, 2000, 11). From a constructivist standpoint, conventions for argumentation, proof and disciplinary closure are seen as integral to the formulation of all knowledge. The languages in which the world may be described are underwritten by models, principles and orientations that become institutionalised in the community of researchers. All attempts at communication are premised on expectations about the knowledge, inclinations and interests of the members of the community the writer addresses.

Under this assumption, there is no way to discuss anything about the world without at the same time negotiating a frame of reference for the understanding of this discourse. Titles do more than express what a text is about: they also reflect who is it intended for, why should it be read and what patterns for understanding it should be employed. This seems an enormously complex rhetorical purpose to be performed in less than a score of words. It is thus

reasonable to assume that the actual meaning of a title will be found in more than its explicit semantic gist. As with all texts, a large part of what titles do is based on tacit strategies to establish a shared rhetorical situation.

### **2.1.2 The psychology of titles**

In cognitive terms, titles can be best understood as *advance organisers* (Ausubel, 1960), that is, expressions of information that help the reader classify and interpret the upcoming text so that it can be usefully attached to a mental model. Organisers are a crucial tool for comprehension in that they “cue” or “prime” prior knowledge about the world, helping articulate the readers’ own experiences with the information conveyed in the authors’ message (Norris and Phillips, 1987).

This priming is important because texts never transmit all the information required to understand the situation they describe. Rather, they build on knowledge which they assume readers to have previously acquired and incorporated into their mental representations. A precise discussion of the nature of this knowledge, the structure of schemata and their relation to texts is beyond the limits of this chapter. It is sufficient to say that information is patterned into specific schemata, where prior experiences and textual cues are used in building networks of interrelated propositions. The models used in interpretation and problem-solving do not only draw on the semantic content of the previously-known propositions, but also on their connections within extant schemata. Their complexity and degree of development are thus instrumental in the correct identification and placement of new information.

In these terms, what is relevant prior knowledge depends on the kind of problem that the reader faces, and encompasses more than the strict semantic content of the propositions in text and memory. The design of the title does not only intend to contribute to a mental model of the text’s topic —advancing some of the knowledge that will be expressed in its macropropositions—, but also engages previously constructed schemata to create a *situation model* (van

Dijk and Kintsch, 1983) describing the real-world *referent* of the text. Useful cognitive cues can relate to the latter without necessarily engaging the textual macrostructure. Titles may be useful for comprehension without directly co-referring to the semantic content of the text's propositions, engaging instead other information that is linked to them in the situation model, or acting by any other form of association (e.g., analogy, allusion, syntactic parallelism, etc. Foltz, 1996).

Finally, titles have a reflexive dimension in that they help construct a model of the text itself, and the communicative situation in which it is used. Van Dijk (1985b), for example, holds that recognising the specific kind of language used in newspaper headlines plays a key rôle in interpreting the attached text as news, with all the consequences this entails. This *context model* is crucial in establishing knowledge about who the participants in communication are, what are their interests, goals and capabilities, and what might be the subsequent course of action. It thus sets the expectations about the components of linguistic interaction, from its purpose to its relation with other texts and its authoritativeness (James, 1990).

The context that the title thus establishes is of paramount importance for the understanding of the text, recalling the principles and orientations that underwrite communication and justification in different communities. The value and interest of the text's contents are measured against the backdrop of the pragmatic context of their production. Unfettered by the scientist ideology prevalent in some of the works we quoted above, studies of titles in literary theory have been ready to acknowledge this variation, as have genre-centred studies in discourses analysis. We now turn to these for the last section of our preliminary discussion.

### 2.1.3 Titles as discourse

The study of titles has received most attention and development in literary theory. As representation in literary works has never been confined to literal



meaning, the need to understand the semantic and pragmatic strategies employed by author and reader in negotiating and building the text's import has made itself felt from a relatively early date. Even before Duchet (1973) published an article baptising the field as *titrologie* ("titology"), a number of authors had variously argued for the semiotic significant of text titles.

While some works have argued for a view of titles as a "condensation" or "synthesis" of the text's meaning, scholars in this field have been ready to challenge this "synonymic hypothesis" (Besa Camprubí, 2002, 25), based on a view of meaning as the *content* of a text, rather than as an *effect* it produces in situated communication. Studies in literary semiotics have insisted from early on that the meaning of texts is not contained in them, but rather the result of an active process of construction where the reader is more than a simple decoder (Eco, 1979). In this view, texts are not synonymous with their meaning, but rather a set of *semiotic instructions* for the process of meaning-making. Titles, in turn, become part of a set of instructions for the interpretation of the text (Weinrich, 1976, 18).

On a constructivist reading, the above can also be said of non-literary prose. The view presented by Hartley (2005) that titles must either attract or inform seems, in this light, an undue simplification of their complex function. Conveying information for interpretation always involves tailoring the text to the requirements of an intended readership, both by embedding cognitive cues in the textual structure—as metadiscursive *indications* that guide the processing of meaning—, and going beyond the individual act of communication in an appeal to the socially shared repertoires for organisation and judgement that belong to the *genres* employed by identifiable communities. Texts thus doubly break with the synonymic model: first, insofar as they provide not a mirror but a *directive* that causally motivates the readers' understanding. Second, because their strategies call upon common conceptions, schemas and standards, passing from the singular text to a socially shared canon (Miller, 1984, 1994). In other words, *informativeness is not an intrinsic property of a certain grammar or design for*

*titles*; it is rather a function of the expectations for information that their intended readers have, of the practices of interpretation and meaning-making to which they are devoted, of the pragmatic goals that the texts are intended to serve, and of the shared social representations covering all these factors and helping conform a disciplinary culture.

It would be prolix to review here the many typologies—including the influential ones by Genette (1987); Groupe  $\mu$  (1970); Hoek (1981) and Levinson (1985)—that have sought to systematically organise the different relations between text and title (for a balanced and erudite commentary of the main trends in literary and philosophical semiotics, see Besa Camprubí, 2002). However, cutting across them is a clear notion of the triple function of titles (Besa Camprubí, 2002, 107ff):

1. that of *designating* or *naming* the text, in such a way as to make reference to the specific work unambiguously possible; the semantic or pragmatic content of the title is irrelevant to this effect, although certain constraints—such as length—are influenced by it;
2. that of *describing* the text, that is, conveying a certain meaning relevant to that provided by the larger entity it designates;
3. that of *seducing* or *enticing* the reader to go further into the work, by suggesting that the cognitive impulses it creates can only be satisfied by the full text.

Viewing discursive activity as an intrinsically social action means that information- and reader-orientation are not understood as separate aspects of communication (Hyland and Tse, 2004). Even in the relatively homogeneous and rigid genres of scientific and academic writing, expectations about such things as the depth and breadth of background information, the ways of formulating hypotheses and claims, or the details about methods and materials have been widely shown to be regulated by the social norms derived from a shared trajectory and expertise in specific practices (Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1994; Hyland, 2000; Myers, 1990).

Titles are no exception, as the wide variation in grammatical structures, length and rhetorical design reported across disciplines and genres comes to show. In the following section, we briefly review some of the main findings and research strategies of previous works.

#### **2.1.4 Current trends in research**

Titles have recourse to a wide range of semiotic resources in their task of orienting and guiding the subsequent comprehension. Anticipating content is one—perhaps the most important—of these, but many more strategic options and foci are available. Titles also can and do look outside the specific semiotic system constituted by the text, co-text and context, alluding to shared assumptions about the world and the situation drawn from pre-existing discourses.

Analysing these strategies for meaning-making requires the analyst to follow suit, addressing both the title and the numerous other discourses and texts it engages in an attempt to encompass the semiotic process. However, even if this principle is familiar to researchers in Critical Discourse Analysis—where it has been claimed that textual analysis “should be combined with analysis of practices of production and consumption” (Fairclough, 1995, 9) and regarded as just one element in a complex social activity—the high demands it places on analytic practice have led many analysts to seek as formal and abstract models as possible. Thus, research has concentrated especially in three easily formalisable aspects of title writing: length, punctuation and grammatical structure.

Following Berkenkotter and Huckin (1994, 31?), who argued that titles in scientific articles had become increasingly informative over time, attention has been paid to the average length of titles in scientific articles (see also Buxton and Meadows, 1977). Other genres, such as popular and academic books or dissertations, have not been as thoroughly explored. The ease in which length is measured has made it a favourite topic in bibliometrics, as the many studies cited by Lewison and Hartley (2005) attest. However, the large scale of the corpora preferred in this predominantly quantitative discipline do not make

them amenable to qualitative structural analysis, and further interdisciplinary collaboration has been scarce.

This same tendency to rely on quantitative procedures has led to machine-aided analyses of punctuation being used as proxies for the analysis of grammatical and rhetorical structure. In an early example, Dillon (1981) made the argument that titles with a complex two-part structure, using colons as structuring devices, were one of the hallmarks of advanced scholarly pursuit. The so-called “Dillon hypothesis of titular colonicity” (Perry, 1985) received much attention, although empirical studies provided mixed evidence. It has served, at least, to challenge the prescriptive view that these sort of titles were cumbersome and pedantic (Day, 1968, 20), and to spark some interest about different possibilities in writing, although more attention has been paid —perhaps frivolously— to alternatives in typographical marking than to more fundamental matters.

Nevertheless, some research has been carried out in distinguishing titles with a noun phrase structure from those framed as full declarative or interrogative sentences, showing considerable disciplinary differences. While titles in most disciplines and research genres take the form of noun phrases, often accompanied by long strings of modifiers, there are other forms that have more of a niche audience. Research articles in biology and the medical sciences routinely employ full declarative forms (Soler, 2007), and writing titles in the form of questions seems to be relatively common in psychology and the social sciences, while it remains unusual in the “harder” fields (Anthony, 2001; Hyland, 2002).

### 2.1.5 Functions and structure in titles

The approaches to titles mentioned above hinge on the examination of rather basic linguistic features throughout extended corpora, relying on statistical computation to extract meaningful patterns. However, this strategy risks missing those features of textual structure that do not become apparent in its surface realisation, or are otherwise resistant to automatic parsing. Mechanical procedures do not seem an adequate route for researching the influence of cultural

and communicative conventions over discourse, which seldom are in biunivocal relation to isolable textual features (Fowler, 1991, 90). To explore the effects of titles on situated understanding—their functional rôle in organising the readers' experience of the text and signposting the cognitive path to be covered—quantitative methods may only provide support and suggestions for a basically qualitative analysis.

One avenue for this form of research draws on the writing advice of Swales and Feak (1994), who offered a number of models for creating compound titles<sup>1</sup> based on the functional relation between their constituent parts. The structures they proposed included PROBLEM:SOLUTION, TOPIC:METHOD, MAJOR:MINOR and GENERAL:SPECIFIC. This suggestion was used by Fortanet et al. (1997) and later by Anthony (2001) as a model for textual analysis. Although it helped explain most titling patterns, some shortcomings were evident. Anthony (2001, 189) noted that some designs for compound titles did not exactly fit any of the extant categories, and that MAJOR:MINOR and GENERAL:SPECIFIC seemed to overlap. He thus added a NAME category and he renamed some of Swales and Feak's ones as TOPIC:DESCRIPTION, TOPIC:SCOPE and TOPIC:METHOD.

This approach seems interesting in that it recognises the internal structuring of elements within the title, an aspect that had been downplayed in most models of title function. How each of them comes to fulfil the global functions of titles—designation, description and seduction—is a matter for situated analyses, taking into consideration local conventions and routine forms of text use.

In the following section, we seek to build one such model for popular management books. We explore some quantitative measures to obtain a preliminary image of titling practices, before engaging a more nuanced analysis of rhetorical and strategic patterns.

## 2.2 An analysis of titles in popular management texts

The centrality and complexity of the semiotic properties of titles make them a useful heuristic tool to begin exploring popular management books, which despite their relative recency have become well established as a genre. Since the publication of Peters and Waterman (1982), a best-seller that overstepped the limits of the specialised market to be read by a general audience, management books have gradually become entrenched as a staple of contemporary popular culture. The phenomenon has not failed to attract attention from business and organisation scholars, and has given rise to heated arguments about the nature and validity of their content.

Existing research has placed its main focus on the impact of the popular management press on the development, circulation and consumption of theories of best management practice. From an initial dismissal —Freeman (1985, 349) wrote that “[business best sellers are] more fad than trend, and as such will have no major impact on organizational life 10 years hence”— the salience of this literature has led scholars to consider its interaction with academic research (Mazza and Álvarez, 2000), the nature of its cycles of diffusion, viewed as “fads” (Abrahamson, 1991; Strang and Macy, 2001), the simplified and formulaic character of much popular management literature (Clark and Greatbatch, 2004) and the international processes of standardisation or convergence (Meyer, 2002a). Still, what exactly constitutes popular management literature is in itself the matter of some debate. Some analysts have linked the appearance of this literature to wider processes of professional redefinition, involving the rise of consulting as an important and lucrative sector in business that globally displaced academic research from some of its functions, while others have argued for a more nuanced analysis to account for the existence of different positions within the consultancy field itself (Collins, 2006), with some professionals setting global trends while others remain largely in a consumer position.

Salaman (2002) holds that the conceptually trying analysis of the fields of popular and academic management knowledge has unjustifiably been equated with the difference between “substantiated” and “faddish” knowledge types, and that most research seeks simply to promote academic works among managerial practitioners. More robust and efficacious criticism of popular publishing would have to delve into the uses to which it is put to. Collins (2004) criticises the absolute separation often exercised between the *content* of popular management literature (which is dismissed as faddish or unsubstantiated) and its *form* (which is praised for its efficacy).

While sometimes these studies have been framed in terms resembling those of discourse analysis, specifically linguistic concerns have remained largely confined to the use of rhetorical devices for impression management. For the most part, these analyses have followed closely the positivist line, negatively comparing this prose to scientific ideal of communication without rhetoric (for example Micklethwait and Wooldridge, 1997). In particular, analysis of the rhetorical move structure of the genre and of the negotiation of the author and audience’s identities has been very limited (but see Clark and Greatbatch, 2002).

We have suggested above that titles are in an ideal position to offer a perspective on these issues. As the opening move of the communicative encounter, they are meant to guide the readers’ comprehension and orient them in their appraisal of the text, at the same time framing it within the bounds of a disciplinary culture. The needs to which they appeal and the assumptions on which they draw are a rich source of information on the workings of managerial culture, as the success of their enticing function depends on a careful assessment of its disciplinary canon. Effective promotional writing needs to highlight both relevance, tailoring communication to the requirements of the audience, and credibility, establishing a competent professional identity.

### 2.2.1 Corpus and methods

Once publications other than books were excluded, the corpus comprised the titles of 112 books. This made sampling unnecessary, as—at the size of 1022 tokens—the universe proved to be manageable for examination and analysis. Clearly, it is difficult to generalise results obtained from a small sample—although eventual replications drawn from similar lists may help provide robust results—but it also allows more detailed study to account for all possible relevant features. The exploratory nature of the research seemed thus well served by this method.

A preliminary analysis was carried out to provide quantitative information. This served not only to link back to previous research—mostly oriented in this direction—but also to obtain a broad picture of the overall nature of the texts. While purely mechanical methods can only provide limited insight into the functional properties of texts, the formal features they discover may provide orientation for subsequent qualitative analyses. Drawing on this information and on the literature mentioned above, our efforts were mainly directed to the elaboration of a classificatory framework. The help of two colleagues was instrumental in checking for inter-rater reliability.

### 2.2.2 Formal properties

In this section we present the findings from formal analyses of popular management literature titles, in preparation for a discussion of their functional structure. Due to constraints of space and focus, we concentrate only on their linguistic properties. While some of the most readily apparent features of titles are graphical in nature, such as greater font size and weight, and top position in the page, our data did not seem to show any domain-specific properties for these, and a full analysis of visual design would entail a different approach and methodology.



### 2.2.2.1 Length

The length of the title is one of its most obvious and best-researched properties. Normative approaches (e.g., those cited by Anthony, 2001, 192) have often favoured economy in title construction. Nevertheless, a clear presentation of the text's contents often necessitates a certain degree of development. These conflicting needs are solved differently by different communities, giving rise to genre-specific patterns.

There is ample justification for seeking brevity in title writing. Besides the material constraints limiting the available space in indexes, page headings and covers, cognitive reasons seem to make brevity desirable. The intellectual effort required to understand a title or recall its exact contents grows exponentially, *ceteris paribus*, with the extent of the information it conveys (Huhmann et al., 2002, 158). Writers are thus likely to be rigorous in the deletion of unnecessary detail and the generalisation of claims in order to simplify the title, facilitating their interpretation by readers, and lowering the barrier for access.

However, it seems necessary to compound this general principle with consideration of the communicative goals of the title. Writers must attune their communication to what they can assume about the extent and nature of the readers' knowledge, as well as the type and focus of publication. Titles have been shown to be instrumental in deciding whether to read further in the text (Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1994, 30), but the initial step of getting to read the title has received less attention. This is doubtlessly linked to the fact that most previous research has focused on scholarly papers, where readers are often committed in advance to the topics covered by a specific journal. It is safe to assume that academics, eager to keep abreast with the relevant research, will scan the indexes of journals or electronic catalogues they know to be close to their own focus. Not all titles, however, are intended to be featured in indexes. The readers of popular books are more likely to find them in more or less specialised sections of bookstores, whether physical or online, and in other commercial areas.

Together with the visual elements of cover and spine design —which we

unfortunately cannot address within the confines of this chapter— titles are responsible for engaging a potentially disaffected audience. Expectations about the previous knowledge and competencies of the readership are likely to be looser as well, since they may make their way to a broadly diverse audience (Hemais, 2001, 45). Considerations about the passage from title to text thus compete with those leading to processing the title in the first place. Brevity may thus be instrumental in maximising initial access to the text, as reducing the cognitive load not only facilitates the reading process once it has been initiated, but also attracts more readers by signalling in advance that no great expenditure will be necessary.

Although simply looking at the average length of titles in our corpus would not seem to support this view, its accuracy becomes visible in further analysis. While the overall length seems close to that of academic articles in some disciplines,<sup>2</sup> this does not necessarily reflect structural similarities. In those titles where no division in clauses is apparent, average length drops by more than half. In compound titles, the first element averages less than 3.5 words. In both cases a rather simple textual unit can play the part of handle for initial attraction and eventual recall. Figure 2.1 shows the distribution for unit lengths in both simple and compound titles.

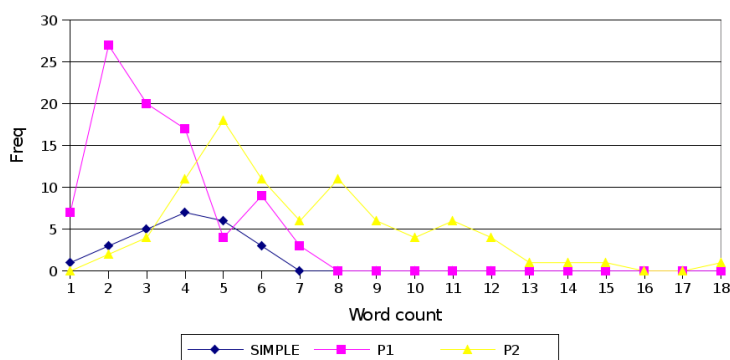


Figure 2.1: Frequency distribution plot of title unit length

### 2.2.2.2 Composite structures

The tendency to create compound titles using colons or other punctuation marks has been long observed (Dillon, 1981). Day (1968, 20) strongly stated his misgivings about the form, claiming that these titles “appear pedantic, place emphasis on a general term rather than a more significant term, necessitate punctuation, scramble indexes, and in general provide poor titles”. His advice notwithstanding, they seem nowadays to be standard practice in research papers in many academic fields, including literary criticism and linguistics (Haggan, 2004, 301), psychology (Hartley, 2005, 95), anthropology (Soler, 2007, 95) and bibliometrics (Lewison and Hartley, 2005, 343), as well as review articles in many disciplines (Soler, 2007, 95).

	All –	Simple –	Compound		
			Combined	1 <sup>st</sup> part	2 <sup>nd</sup> part
Minimum	1	1	3	1	2
Maximum	25	6	25	7	18
Average	9.152	3.920	10.655	3.264	7.058
Std. dev.	4.520	1.351	3.953	1.566	3.112
<i>n</i>	112	25	87		

Table 2.1: Length of titles in corpus ( $n = 112$ )

Compound titles offer a clear advantage in some respects over complex sentences with many modifying phrases. As they facilitate the chunking of information in its constituent parts, they may provide not only an isolable summary of the text’s field or topic, but also an easier path for recall and identification. Haggan (2004, 303) suggests that authors may employ the compound form to shift the most important elements in the title leftwards, so as to immediately map the location of the paper’s subject within the wider field. This would intuitively seem to match the difference in average length we noted in Table 2.1 above, where we showed that the second element in compound titles tends to be longer and thus more complex than the first one.

In the popular management books we studied, the second member in compound titles tends to be much longer than the first. This suggests that the

parts are not hierarchically equivalent, but rather structured as a TITLE and subordinate SUBTITLE. In these pairs, the shorter part provides a memorable handle for identification and recall, while the subtitle details the specifics of its content. This hierarchical pattern is reflected in the visual composition of book covers, where the first part is often set in visibly larger type. The second is often omitted altogether from the book spine and informal references to the text. The design, illustrated in the samples below, effectively addresses both the promotional and the informative needs of the readership:

- (1) a. World Class: Thriving Locally in the Global Economy
- b. The Dilbert Principle: A Cubicle's-Eye View of Bosses,  
       Meetings, Management Fads & Other Workplace Afflic-  
       tions
- c. Service America! Doing Business in the New Economy
- d. Comeback: The Fall & Rise of the American Automobile  
       Industry

Functional differentiation is apparent as well in the remarkable scarcity of informational content in the first element in these pairs. While in some, such as Example (1-c) above, the text's subject matter is at least elliptically alluded to, most others are too generic or too obscure even for identification. Titles of this sort cannot thus appeal to the audience's interest in the topic, and their allure must be explained otherwise. In section 2.2.3.4 we explore some general strategies used to elicit attention.

### 2.2.2.3 Grammatical form

Analysis of the grammatical structure of titles shows that only very rarely are they complete sentences, consisting rather of a more or less modified noun phrase. The seven most frequent structures, all of them with a noun phrase at their head, account for over half of the corpus. Their frequency is shown in Table 2.2.

<b>Structure</b>	<i>n</i>	%
NP:NP+PP*	19	16.96
NP+PP*	12	10.71
NP+PP*:NP+PP*	11	9.82
NP:PART	6	5.35
NP:PART+PP*	5	4.46
NP:NP	5	4.46
NP	5	4.46

Table 2.2: Most frequent grammatical structures

Other forms reported in the literature, such as full sentences, only rarely appear in our corpus. The few interrogative and declarative clauses we found as titles seemed to be motivated by factors not directly related to the title's informative content. In three out of the four cases, the choice seems to have been made on the basis of style, either as a metaphor or a literary allusion. We discuss those cases in section 2.2.3.4. The remaining one also has literary resemblances, although these arise from the thesis it succinctly states rather than from its form:

- (2) a. Leadership is an Art

A construction that to the best of our knowledge had not been previously reported is the imperative one, present as the second member in a compound title in our corpus:

- (3) a. The Discipline of Market Leaders: Choose Your Customers, Narrow Your Focus, Dominate Your Market

Imperative language, with its strong interpersonal implications of authority over the reader, would seem a striking choice in a professional context, where shared membership in a disciplinary community underwrites communication. Even when it is liberally used—as in textbooks (Hyland, 2000, 126)—, it is normally embedded within a larger epistemic frame and intended to familiarise the reader with the habits and views of a disciplinary community, which often include read-

ing patterns encompassing different formats and modalities (Swales et al., 1998). This would hardly be the case for a title. This specific usage is rather redolent of “cookbook” directive language, coinciding with the prominent constructions to this effect that we discuss in the following section.

### **2.2.3 Functional structure**

Most of the above discussion seems unfocused without a clearer notion of the communicative intent of titles. As we noted above, previous studies have either focused on a limited range of typical patterns, or analysed titles as indivisible wholes, where the interplay of elements cannot be explored.

An interesting exception is the functional framework for the analysis of titles presented by Goodman et al. (2001), who sought to address potential ambiguities in communication by identifying what kind of information was conveyed in biomedical research paper titles. They developed a set of five categories for analysing this information: TOPIC, METHODS (or DESIGN), DATASET, RESULTS and CONCLUSION.

While useful, this core set focuses solely on the text as evidence of a research activity, disregarding other ways in which it may provide orientation for its audience. Hartley (2005, 208), for example, informally observed that certain text labels —such as “guide”, “handbook” or “review”— can be used to convey expectations about the communicative purpose of the work.

#### **2.2.3.1 A functional model for the analysis of titles**

The difference seems to be parallel to that observed by Thomas and Hawes (1994, 132) between verbs reporting Experimental and Discourse activities. Just as reporting entails framing a textual report as a certain type of activity, be it research, cognition or communication, titling a work may highlight any of these different aspects.

Using the well-known taxonomy developed by Thomas and Hawes (1994) as a basis, we developed the following schema for title elements:

- *Real-World* elements in the title provide information about the topic of the research as a naturally-occurring phenomenon, that is, considered apart from the research work performed, and from the linguistic activity involved in communicating this research. Naturally, the SUBJECT MATTER is the most prominent member in this category, although it can be argued that titles asserting a CONCLUSION (such as the full-sentence declarative titles found to be typical of biomedical writing) also make reference to real-world events and properties rather than to the research or discourse activities surrounding them. We further subdivide subject matter-related information into NAME statements (such as those observed by Anthony 2001), INTENSIONAL descriptions—which label the topic by the attributes or qualities it possesses—and EXTENSIONAL descriptions—which designate their topic by an enumeration of the objects it comprises. Further precision could be made, if necessary, about the DOMAIN, ASPECT, PLACE and TIME of the investigated object, although it was unnecessary to our purposes. This kind of elements are drawn from the *macrostructures* (van Dijk, 1980) of the text.
- *Research* elements in the title make reference to the design, planning, execution and evaluation of the process of investigation. Most of Goodman et al.'s categories (METHODS, DATASET and RESULTS) fall within this group. Following Haggan's suggestion that compound titles often seek to progressively focus the reader's attention by signalling the academic field or research programme in which the findings can be inscribed, we add FIELD to this list. Question titles, such as those studied by Hyland (2002, 539), clearly express the PROBLEM that motivated the study.
- *Genre* elements in the title focus on the social interaction of which the discursive practice is a part. These include the explicit labelling of a TEXT TYPE, as noted by Hartley, as well as the intended AUDIENCE, the identity of the AUTHOR and, most importantly, the communicative GOAL

of the text, i.e., the function it is supposed to fulfil for its reader. This kind of elements is related to the *superstructure* or *schematic structure* of the discourse (van Dijk and Kintsch, 1983).

- Some other elements do not seem to have direct parallels in the reporting framework of Thomas and Hawes (1994). Authors in linguistics or literary theory, for example, sometimes embed a SAMPLE of their object in the title in the form of a quotation, taking advantage of the homogeneity between communication medium and object of study. (cfr. Haggan, 2004, 305).

More globally, titles can be seen as focusing only on *semantics* —specifying only the text’s specific topic or, more vaguely, its subject matter—, or else addressing the *pragmatic* aspects of the communicative context to provide an organizing scheme for textual comprehension. Obviously, the latter kind of titles does not lack semantic content. Rather, it seeks to complement it with guidelines about its embedding in the communicative process, pointing both to the text itself—in a reflexive representation of genre— or outside it to the participants it engages.

Cutting across the categories in this schema, it seemed relevant to indicate whether the information was presented in a more or less *literal* manner, or a *rhetorical trope* was used instead. While it is not entirely clear that the distinction between literal and figurative language is completely consistent, there are good reasons for maintaining the notion of a conventionally-established *coded meaning* that is more immediately cued by lexical and grammatical structure (Coulson and Oakley, 2005, 1512). Non-coded meanings are perceived as more salient, and thus marked, exerting a greater psychological impact. Viewing figurative language in this light seems more balanced than assuming, as claimed by Hartley (2005), that metaphor, allusion and other devices intrigue their readers at the price of obscurity. This is explored at greater length below, in section 2.2.3.4.



**2.2.3.2 Title structure, information and persuasion**

<b>Element</b>	<i>n</i>	%
<b>Real-world elements (any)</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>81.25</b>
SUBJECT MATTER (INTENSIONAL, LITERAL)	72	64.28
SUBJECT MATTER (INTENSIONAL, FIGURATIVE)	29	25.89
SUBJECT MATTER (NAME, LITERAL)	10	8.92
SUBJECT MATTER (EXTENSIONAL, LITERAL)	8	7.14
CONCLUSION (LITERAL)	4	3.57
SUBJECT MATTER (EXTENSIONAL, FIGURATIVE)	2	1.78
CONCLUSION (FIGURATIVE)	1	0.89
<b>Research elements (any)</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>21.42</b>
RESULTS (LITERAL)	11	9.82
METHOD (LITERAL)	5	4.46
PROBLEM (FIGURATIVE)	4	3.57
FIELD (FIGURATIVE)	3	2.67
FIELD (LITERAL)	2	1.78
PROBLEM (LITERAL)	1	0.89
<b>Genre elements</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>57.14</b>
GOAL (LITERAL)	41	36.60
TEXT-TYPE (LITERAL)	20	17.85
GOAL (FIGURATIVE)	10	8.92
AUTHOR (LITERAL)	2	1.78
AUDIENCE (FIGURATIVE)	1	0.89

Table 2.3: Frequency of functional elements across all titles ( $n = 112$ )

<b>Pattern</b>	<i>n</i>	%
SUBJECT MATTER (INTENSIONAL)	28	25.00
SUBJECT MATTER (INTENSIONAL)+GOAL	14	12.50
GOAL	12	10.71
SUBJECT MATTER (NAME)+SUBJECT MATTER (INTENSIONAL)	7	6.25
SUBJECT MATTER (INTENSIONAL)+TEXT TYPE	6	5.35
GOAL+SUBJECT MATTER (INTENSIONAL)	5	4.46

Table 2.4: Most frequent patterns in functional structure

The titles in our corpus were divided into their constituent elements, and tagged by hand to identify the function of each. To prevent classification biases, a sample of twenty-five titles was analysed by two raters kept blind to the overall goals of the study. Agreement was considerable, yielding a Fleiss'  $\kappa$  value of 0.79. Tables 2.3 and 2.4 present a summary of the elements observed and the recurring patterns.

One remarkable finding is that a significant percentage of titles (21,43%) do

not include a SUBJECT MATTER statement at all. This seems to show that the admonishments of researchers and advice authors, who emphasise the need to present the work's contents clearly and succinctly, do not necessarily coincide with the strategies writers employ to represent their work and establish initial contact. While getting the semantic gist across is doubtlessly the most usual concern in devising a title, pragmatic attempts to engage the readership draw on a much larger pool of resources. Nevertheless, semantic summary remains the most frequently employed strategy, either by itself (in 33.92% of the total cases) or in combination with other elements, such as the TEXT-TYPE or the intended GOAL:

- (4) a. Leadership in organizations
- b. Strategic management of technology and innovation
- c. Technical analysis of the financial markets: a comprehensive guide to trading methods and applications
- d. The art and science of negotiation: how to resolve conflicts and get the best out of bargaining

This last example showcases the strategy employed in a large number of titles: to go beyond the description of the individual text and point to the possible applications and benefits it may bring to its readership. This underlines the pragmatic bent of most of these books, and suggests that the knowledge they seek is to be understood as *practical* skill rather than analytic clarity. Not only are titles of this sort clearly promotional, they also foreground a very specific view of usefulness. Unlike the research articles studied by Berkenkotter and Huckin (1994, 33), where conclusions and empirical findings were in the spotlight, the kind of benefits that readers of popular management literature find valuable do not generally consist of hard data or theoretical arguments. They are rather solutions to practical problems, giving popular management titles the recipe-like structure that other researchers have remarked in their content (Jackson, 2001b).

- (5) a. Experiential Marketing: how to get customers to sense, feel, think, act, relate
- b. In search of excellence: lessons from America's best-run companies
- c. Leveraging the new infrastructure: how market leaders capitalize on information technology
- d. Managing the non-profit organization: principles and practices

The importance of this dimension is highlighted by the fact that GOAL is the second most frequent element in titles, present in over one third of our corpus. This seems to match the general trend in the findings of Hyland (2000, 77), who noted that applied disciplines —such as engineering or marketing— tend to signal the utility and material applicability of their research in establishing its value. Nevertheless, their presence in popular management titles seems to go beyond what is normally expected in academic writing. While scholars have to negotiate their claims of usefulness and benefit with readers whom they meet in relatively equal standing, and all departures from the established consensus have to be framed against the backdrop of a shared body of disciplinary knowledge, the asymmetric competence presupposed in popular management books favours the adoption of a more direct style.

One frequent strategy in the presentation of the GOAL was the use of a participial phrase to present it. While in syntactic terms the phrase acts as a noun, the construction typically functions to express not a participant or process, but rather the purpose of an action (Jordan, 1999)— in this case, the goals that readers of the book will be able to accomplish. At the same time, the ambiguity with the gerund form helps view the phrase as the “subject” of the book. Thus, even if titles like the following do not actually *describe* the actual process presented by the participles, but rather *prescribe* what the reader is instructed to do to achieve that goal, the choice of syntactic structure gives an

empirical slant to their contents. This is a powerful strategic resource to allow the juxtaposition of the potential —that is, the deontic rôle that the reader is invited to enact— and the actual —that is, the descriptive statements about the managerial world that the work contains, and from which it draws its persuasive power. Fairclough (2003b) has observed that this “slippage between prescription and description” has a powerful disciplinary effect in policing what is regarded as normal and expectable. Following the prescribed course becomes a prerequisite for experiencing one’s own actions as regular and norm-conforming.

- (6) a. Business @ the speed of thought: succeeding in the digital economy
- b. Service America!: doing business in the new economy
- c. The one to one future: building relationships one customer at a time
- d. World class: thriving locally in the global economy

Getting these prescriptions to have an effect, however, involves more than a flat-out expression of goals. Even if power and knowledge asymmetries are the norm in overtly pedagogical genres, the writer’s credibility as a skilled practitioner who can deliver authoritatively on a given topic always comes under the scrutiny of the audience. An initial degree of sanction is granted in the very act of publication, as the printed word has come to culturally embody the endorsement of publishers and other gatekeepers who control the expensive access to the printed media (Wilson, 1983), but this endowment does not go a long way towards ensuring the attention and confidence of the audience. Other resources must be mobilised to project the correct ethos for persuasion, most importantly the claim to insider status.

One strategy writers use to position themselves as trustworthy members of the community of practice where their audience is located, knowledgeable in the specific needs and constraints experienced in professional activity, is the signalling of shared presuppositions about relevant problems. By addressing

specific issues that potential readers may experience, or specific goals they may have set for themselves in the course of their practice, the writers display their familiarity with the professional environment, and suggest their ability to accurately provide guidelines or solutions. “How-to” formulations and participial phrases may be used to imply that the writer is already acquainted with the readers’ goals:

- (7) a. Rethinking the sales force: redefining selling to create and capture customer value
- b. The dance of change: the challenges to sustaining momentum in learning organizations
- c. Time-based competition: the next battleground in American manufacturing
- d. The new deal at work: managing the market-driven workforce

Titles offer little space to argue these presuppositions at length, and writers must find economic formulas to showcase their familiarity with the past and present state of practice, and support their claim to insider status. This may take the form of an *iterative* formulation, as in the first example above, implying that the goal to be undertaken draws on a current convention that both author and reader know; of verbs or qualifiers expressing a continuative aspect, such as “sustain” in Example (7-b); or other forms of constructing series, such as “next” and “new” in the last two ones.

A second way to claim insider credibility involves presenting oneself in close association with other esteemed actors. While this strategy is at its most clear in the identity work performed by authorial narratives, where the author’s intimacy with these figures can be better developed (see chapter 4), titles can already go a long way to position the writer as a prestigious member of the professional network. This not only highlights the importance of the topic for the community, but also presents the author as a savvy individual engaged at

the top level of practice. Perhaps the most frequent way to do this is through the “name-dropping”<sup>3</sup> of illustrious companies or corporate executives. More general statements positively appraising the source of the information are also a common choice. In fact, devotion to “excellent” or “outperforming” companies, whose actions are minutely scrutinised in the search for the secrets to success, has been often argued to be a defining feature of contemporary managerial practice (Whittington et al., 2003):

- (8) a. aol.com: how Steve Case beat Bill Gates, nailed the net-heads and made millions in the war for the Web
- b. In search of excellence: lessons from America’s best-run companies
- c. Leveraging the new infrastructure: how market leaders capitalize on information technology
- d. The leadership moment: nine true stories of triumph and disaster and their lessons for us all

The remaining most frequent element in titles is TEXT-TYPE, which occurs in 17.85% of the titles. This sort of rhetorical guidance seems also to be linked to the tutorial quality of management texts. In most cases in which mention was made of the work’s nature, it was with the intent of highlighting its relevance as a pragmatic or introductory resource. This conforms to the findings of previous studies, where metadiscursive orientation had most often been found to be used as guidance to novice or inexperienced readers. As competence increases, readers are better able to draw the relevant inferences on their own, simply on the basis of the textual content.

- (9) a. Technical analysis of the financial markets: a comprehensive guide to trading methods and applications
- b. The team handbook: how to use teams to improve quality

- c. Information rules: a strategic guide to the network economy

The few cases not defining themselves as guidebooks mainly comprised texts showcasing their narrative content. While this may seem odd in a basically practical field, the narrative dimension has often been highlighted as crucial in management writing (Boje, 2001; Czarniawska, 1999). Narratives play a complex role, organising information and justifying action in a compact and easily understandable manner. Their episodic nature ensures a reduced cognitive load, while narrative writing allows for a more reader-friendly style than expository prose (this point is developed at length in chapter 4). Finally, the “real” aspect they emphasise provides empirical support for their authors’ theses —suggesting that they are, after all, modelled after real events:

- (10) a. The leadership moment: nine true stories of triumph and disaster and their lessons for us all
- b. How the Cadillac got its fins: and other true tales from the annals of business and marketing

Other communicative functions appear less frequently. METHOD indications tend to appear in older, more academic works, sometimes from related disciplines rather than management itself. When a thesis or CONCLUSION is drawn, it does not resemble the very detailed ones of biomedical articles, but rather tends to be provocative, as in (2) above. The remaining elements were too infrequent in our corpus for interpretation to be anything but speculative.

### 2.2.3.3 Further specifying the topic

We did not pursue a detailed investigation of specifically described elements within the text’s SUBJECT MATTER, as a preliminary exploration revealed that the long strings of chained post-modifiers discussed by Haggan (2004, 308) are largely absent from our corpus. She does not present quantitative data to enable

a strict comparison, but Figure 2.2 shows that few of our titles show even two post-modifying phrases, thus precluding the precise zoning-in described in her work.

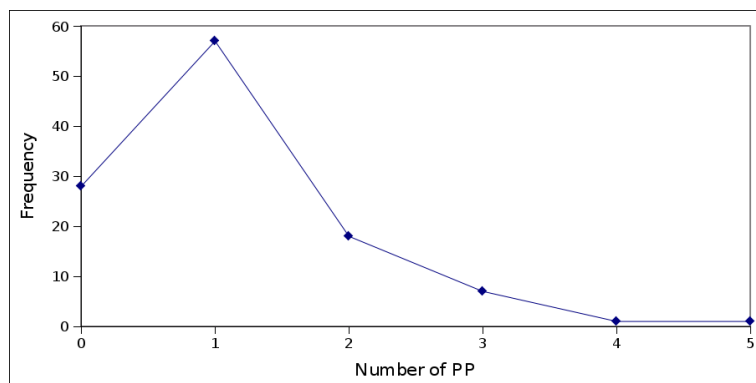


Figure 2.2: Frequency distribution plot of PP in titles

A frequency analysis of the propositions employed in our corpus shows that *of* is the most frequent one, comprising 54 of the 129 tokens. In many of these cases it was used to specify the scope of the investigated field, designating the carrier of an attribute. Less often it was paired with a nominalised noun to indicate the patient of a material process, reminiscent of the standard format of scientific prose:

- (11) a. Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion  
 b. The Functions of the Executive  
 c. Diffusion of Innovations

Second in frequency is *to*, which often appears after a noun or pronoun to indicate the goal of the text, as shown in Excerpt (9); there are 24 instances of this form. *In*, which appears 20 times, is used to indicate the scope of the study by restricting the studied entity or domain. *For* indicates the goal of the action, or more rarely the time or domain in which it takes place. With 11 occurrences, it is the fourth most frequent pronoun.



#### 2.2.3.4 Figures of speech

In the discussion above, we have glossed over the distinction between literal and figurative expression. In some respects, it was secondary to other rhetorical concerns. Writers seeking to present the benefits of the text in a convincing manner could and did choose either form with an effective result. However, departing from the unmarked norm of language use may produce some powerful effects, to which we now turn.

Hartley (2005, 204) repeats the conventional wisdom in technical writing in presenting the alternative between rhetorical and informative titles as if it were mutually exclusive. From the positivist point of view we have discussed above, rhetorical “tricks” are deviations from the ideal of a transparent depiction of fact. They detract from the quality of communication by displacing resources and attention from the core denotational meaning to secondary or purely stylistic features. The implied presupposition is that so-called “literal” language is devoid of rhetorical intent, being simply a representation of what the world is like. Drawing attention to the circumstances of communication impairs its ability to function as a mirror of nature.

Sociological and linguistic analyses of academic writing, however, have shown that maximal clarity is not an abstract property of denotative language, but rather the effect of matching the form and substance of the text to the expectations of the intended readers. We have seen above that authors seek to engage their readership by foregrounding the aspects of the text that are likely to meet their concerns, in a manner consistent with the disciplinary canons for relevance and usefulness (Hyland, 2002, 540). The promotional and the informative are not contradictory dimensions, but rather intricately interwoven processes taking place concurrently in all communication. As one informant quoted by Berkenkotter and Huckin (1994, 33) makes very clear, having one’s message reach its audience means that you “[g]otta sell the stuff [...] it’s gotta be something that really catches people’s eyes, so that they stand up and pay attention”.

Thus, the contrast advanced by Haggan (2004, 305, 310) between the elegant or enigmatic forms in literary criticism and the maximal informativeness of hard-scientific fields seems mistaken in presupposing that what readers in all disciplines find informative can be uniformly determined by reference to the subject matter. In the light of the significant differences in the way that information is structured for communication in different disciplines, the construction of knowledge may involve very different processes and strategies. While the neatly accumulative pattern of development in harder fields leads to more compact communities (Toulmin, 1972), where research foci are clear-cut and isolated enough that only experts with very similar interests might be willing and able to make use of a colleague's findings, softer disciplines often show overlaps and unexpected linkages between research spaces. Knowledge thus flows more easily across the boundaries of fields and programmes, and authors may have a greater interest in addressing a wide group of readers, beyond those specifically scanning titles for specific keywords.

The use of questions in titles—which seems to be rare in the hard sciences, but much less so in the social ones and the humanities—is one example of this difference. It seeks to make readers aware of a guiding problem that may not be immediately apparent to those coming from a different background. Other writers may use literary or cultural allusions, enigmatic formulations, or exemplary quotations in order to highlight analogies and contrasts with other, better known phenomena. Whenever the readership cannot be assumed to possess the same interests and background than the writer, the resources that may be useful to entice them into reading become more varied and less specific.

Huhmann et al. (2002, 158) suggest that artful language attracts attention precisely because of the modulation it imposes on informativeness. Deviating from the conventionally standard path of information conveyance—the “coded meaning” of Coulson and Oakley (2005)—, figures of speech secure the readers' attention because they impose slightly higher requirements on processing. Being clearly distinct from both the co-text and the expected plain language, they

increase in salience, which improves the chances of perception, identification and recall. This phenomenon —known as the *von Restorff* (1933) effect— has been found to impact text processing in similar ways (O’Brien and Myers, 1985).

Minimum	0
Maximum	4
Average	0.768
Standard deviation	0.930

Table 2.5: Rhetorical figures per title in corpus ( $n = 112$ )

Working from the suggestions of previous works (e.g. Huhmann et al., 2002) and a preliminary exploration of the materials, we scanned the corpus for all instances of rhetorical devices. Seven figures were found to occur frequently enough to warrant attention. Table 2.5 shows some global descriptive statistics, while the most frequent devices are listed in Table 2.6.

<b>Device</b>	<i>n</i>	%
Metaphor	23	20.53
Hyperbole	18	16.07
Alliteration	17	15.17
Allusion	9	8.03
Parallelism	8	7.14
Ambiguity	7	6.25
Oxymoron	4	3.57

Table 2.6: Most frequent rhetorical devices

**2.2.3.4.1 Schemes** Of these, least interesting from a functional point of view are the two examples of *schemes*, that is, figures concerned with the arrangement of lexical items and their phonetic values. *Alliteration* is prominently used to provide additional impact and zest to a formulation without greatly influencing its content. *Parallelism* often takes the form of isocolon, piling up similar elements within a clause. The usual rule that holds three to be the ideal length for such an enumeration is almost invariably followed.

Being largely devoid of semantic impact, no particular section of functional element within the title seemed to be the preferred location for this figure. The

significant length required for parallelism, nevertheless, generally precluded its appearance in the first member of compound titles:

- (12) a. Building strong brands  
 b. A Peacock in the Land of Penguins: A Tale of Diversity and Discovery  
 c. Discovering the Soul of Service: The Nine Drivers of Sustainable Business Success
- (13) a. Organizational Learning: Creating, Retaining and Transferring Knowledge  
 b. Out of the crisis: quality, productivity and competitive position  
 c. The Discipline of Market Leaders: Choose Your Customers, Narrow Your Focus, Dominate Your Market

Schemes provide writers with a simple resource to attract attention, although they have little to offer in semantic terms. This visible lack of substance may actually detract from the title's appeal in case of overuse. One case in our sample employed both alliteration and parallelism to produce a title of doubtful taste, unless it be read as a parody of pulp entertainment:

- (14) a. aol.com: How Steve Case beat Bill Gates, nailed the netheads and made millions in the war for the web

**2.2.3.4.2 Tropes** As they concern the semantic properties of words, *tropes* provide more insight on the communicative intent of authors. Of these, the most frequent is *metaphor*, which offers authors a unique opportunity to convey appraisal and interpretation in the limited space of titles. Reframing the text's SUBJECT MATTER or GOAL in metaphorical terms economically packs a semantically rich interpretive procedure, calling to mind the complex set of connotations associated with the source domain.

While our sample ( $n = 23$ ) is too reduced to allow for the unambiguous identification of systematic mappings, some patterns seem apparent and provide insight on the valuations customarily embedded in managerial culture. The non-deterministic nature ascribed to managerial activity is for example evident in the frequent use of living entities as source domains to describe market or corporate structures:

- (15) a. Business @ the speed of thought: using a digital nervous system
- b. Discovering the soul of service: the nine drivers of sustainable business success
- c. The soul of a new machine

This also helps construct an image of corporations as substantive entities, separate from the actions and will of their owners and managers— a potentially powerful resource in depicting economic change as an autonomous process. As non-determinism entails a degree of uncertainty over the outcome of actions, unavoidable risk and constant change are one of the hallmarks of the current managerial discourse. Metaphor is also used to emphasise the risks faced by those competing in the market, as well as encoding an attitudinal model of managerial behaviour. By juxtaposing the domain of risk with actively challenging process goals, it suggests that these dangers are to be defied rather than feared. Not uncommonly this depiction gains dramatic weight from the use of *hyperbole*, which helps portray key players in the managerial arena in an adventurous, almost epic light (Khurana, 2002).

- (16) a. Crossing the chasm: marketing and selling high-tech products to mainstream customers
- b. Unleashing the killer app: digital strategies for market dominance
- c. Inside the tornado: strategies for developing, leverag-

ing, and surviving hypergrowth markets

While the above examples take some pains to make their intended meaning apparent, in a few cases the metaphor remains mostly unexplained in the title, and the reader is forced to turn to the text for an elucidation of what the target domain may be. Hartley (2007) condemns these titles as “mystifying” and unhelpful; his description may not be entirely justified,<sup>4</sup> but it seems clear that the choice for such a title is a risky one, and likely to be fruitful only when the author has other means at his command to inform readers of the text’s objectives:

- (17) a. The Lexus and the olive tree: understanding globalization  
 b. A peacock in the land of penguins: a tale of diversity and discovery

Despite the misgivings expressed by Crosby (1976) and Hartley (2007), *allusion* is often frequent as well. It seeks to elucidate the title by drawing on analogies or contrasts with already-known works. To ensure that the reference’s target can be unequivocally and universally identified, selection tends to canonical quotations from canonical works with little regard to subtlety. An Anglo-centric bias is clearly apparent, taking its expressions from Shakespeare or the United States Declaration of Independence:

- (18) a. All consumers are not created equal: the differential marketing strategy for brand loyalty and profits  
 b. The experience economy: work is theater & every business a stage

Other allusions show a different pattern, where the frame of reference is not classical culture but contemporary works from a related field. This serves as an effective intertextual reference, easily framing the work within its field and pro-

gramme. Thus, *The social psychology of organizations* was answered a decade and a half later by *The social psychology of organizing*. In other cases the allusion may be unintended, although it seems unlikely that the authors and editors of *The wisdom of teams: Creating the high-performance organization* would be unaware that *The ultimate advantage*, published two years earlier, bore the subtitle *Creating the high-involvement organization*.

Of all tropes, *ambiguity* seems to fit most closely the paradigm of incongruity mentioned above (Huhmann et al., 2002). As with metaphors, ambiguous expressions are most often present in the initial member in compound titles. Many of them rely on the polysemy of gerund forms for their effect:

- (19) a. Leading minds: an anatomy of leadership  
 b. Organizing genius: the secrets of creative collaboration

Others resemble puns, drawing on humour to generate impact:

- (20) a. Service America!: doing business in the new economy  
 b. Net gain: expanding markets through virtual communities

Finally, *oxymoron* is sometimes employed as well. While its use is not very prevalent, it seems of particular significance, since it has been traditionally intended to hint at a hidden or suppressed meaning; it challenges conventional wisdom in suggesting that the apparently contradictory terms are not ultimately so. As such, it significantly boosts the appearance of novelty and iconoclasm of a work, which is often one of its prime selling points:

- (21) a. Competing on the edge: strategy as structured chaos  
 b. World class: thriving locally in the global economy

## 2.3 Discussion

Against the backdrop of a social constructionist theory of knowledge, this chapter has explored titles as a promising avenue of research into the discursive practices of different communities. Through the routine practices that conform the stylistic canon of the genre, something is revealed about the beliefs about professional practice and the expectations for interaction with readers that inform the writing of management *gurus*. In presenting an initial point of engagement with the text, titles set the tone for subsequent interaction; they concisely reflect disciplinary and generic norms about usefulness, meaningfulness and situated practice. In domains, such as popular management literature, where no institutional structure underwrites the system of diffusion and adoption of knowledge, titles are in a privileged position to show the rhetorical processes at play in this negotiation.

While previous research has taken this rhetorical context for granted — adopting a positivist account of empirical enquiry, and a corresponding focus on *things* such as “information” rather than on *processes*—, we have sought to show that this leads to some systematic equivocations. The positivist frame does not only lead to highly artificial forms of research, focusing on secondary quantitative characteristics rather than addressing the complexity of writing practice, but also misrepresents actual scientific and technical writing by disregarding its rhetorical element. Failing to understand the processes involved in the composition of disciplinary writing, it provides a lopsided assessment that imperfectly reflects the real performance of practitioners. We suggest that this *allogoxia* is one of the reasons behind the noted inability of academic critique to provide a useful counterpoint to the defects of popular management theories (Collins, 2001a, 32).

In this chapter, we have sought to show how writers of popular management books use a careful selection and presentation of different informational elements to construct a textual image of the disciplinary practices they are embedded in



and to situate themselves as expert practitioners within it. Titles are infused with this rhetorical character, metadiscursively commenting on themselves and the context in which they are used. To define their own expert identity and highlight the contribution they bring to the potential reader, writers employed a variety of resources for engagement, exhibiting shared knowledge about goals and important actors. At the same time, they seek to embed an interpretive stance in the very reduced space offered by titles through a careful use of implication, figurative language and syntactic modulation.

The study of titles, nevertheless, is still very much an under-researched field, and only recently the predominance of normative works has given way to empirical descriptions. This deficiency is compounded by the fact that the extensive studies conducted in literary theory have received little attention from researchers in applied linguistics, despite the similarity in goals and the frequent affinity in theoretical standpoint. Here we have sought to highlight some of the ways in which insights from both these fields can be fruitfully integrated to provide a more nuanced and rigorous account of writing practices.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>We prefer this term to Day's "hanging", which is dismissive, or Hartley's "colonic", which seems inappropriate, as a number of typographical devices can be used for this purpose besides the colon.

<sup>2</sup>Haggan (2004, 295) quotes averages of 9.4 and 8.8 for literature and linguistic paper titles, respectively, and Anthony (2001, 190) found computer science titles to average 8.9 words. The scarcity of detailed statistical data in most published work precludes nuanced comparison; only Fortanet et al. (1997) and Anthony (2001) report the minimum lengths observed, which in both cases are above those in our corpus. Statistics on the separate chunks in compound titles have not been reported before, to the best of our knowledge.

<sup>3</sup>An extreme case of name-dropping, although inapparent in the title proper,

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is the not uncommon practice of publishing ghost-written material under the name of a well-known executive or consultant who may have actually had nothing to do with its design and execution. One of the earliest and most instructive examples is Alfred Sloan's pseudo-autobiography *My years at General Motors*, written by John McDonald from material collected by the business historian Alfred D. Chandler, Jr, but the practice has grown tremendously since the establishment of the "management advice industry" (Clark and Greatbatch, 2004).

<sup>4</sup>His discussion of the issue is at times misleading, as he fails to mention the informative subtitles in the works he mentions.

## Chapter 3

# Contextualisation through metadiscourse

This chapter is concerned with the analysis of metadiscourse in popular management books. Through this admittedly complex and often contested analytic category, we attempt to capture the explicit cues in the textual surface deployed by authors to provide guidance along the process of interpretation. Taking the numerous previous studies of academic discourse as a point of reference, we seek to explore how a common understanding of the situation of communication is elicited in popular management texts, in order to explore the routine social and epistemic practices that give management knowledge its specific flavour.

Objectivist accounts of communication assume that a text's meaning consists of its propositions about independently-existing states of affairs, and that whatever is said about the discourse process itself is therefore of secondary importance. As we have seen in chapter 2, however, the structures and patterns of discourse are motivated by much more than its explicit semantic content. Pragmatic concerns —making clear what the text asserts, what it implies, and what it calls its readers to do— are embedded throughout its structure, orienting the readers in the daunting task of interpretation. The ongoing negotiation

of these contextual dimensions is an essential part of communication, and is realised through a multitude of linguistic and discursive devices at all levels.

We argue that an examination of the lexical and grammatical resources used for metadiscursive purposes can shed light on the range of discursive functions that popular management texts are intended to perform. The notion that texts are composed for a specific purpose—or a set of them—is crucial to the modern conception of *genre* (Miller, 1984), where discourse is conceived and classified by the social action that it seeks to accomplish, rather than by any formal regularities. It also serves to link texts to their specific setting or, more broadly, *context*: the many social and technical dimensions—medium of expression, intended readership, conventional expectations, etc.—that authors must keep in mind to make their expression a valuable contribution to a shared discursive practice.

Applying this view of written text as a locus of interpersonal interaction, we provide a quantitative and qualitative examination of metadiscourse features in a sample of management texts extracted from our corpus. The choice of an analytic framework is not trivial, as work in this area has not yet unified the findings of composition research, ESP, pragmatics and linguistic anthropology. Perhaps the most widely used approach to the analysis of academic text is that derived from the work of Crismore et al. (1993) and especially Hyland (1998b, 2000, 2005). Although problematic in some regards, it has been profitably used to explore other knowledge-creating and -establishing genres, such as textbooks, scientific letters and research articles. In comparative terms, it allows us to highlight how the specific intent of popular management texts is qualitatively different from any of those. Their dynamic is intimately tied to that of professional work, where problem-solving takes less the form of constructing coherent global models and more that of on-line solving specific tasks. At the same time, it is not simply set by technical imperatives. Ideological preferences, such as the strong dislike of professional managers for academic customs, markedly influence argumentation and textual development. Certain

organising devices—such as lists, extended sets of brief quotations, or insistent projection of a reader persona—become significant in the attempt to satisfy these complex requirements. We seek to shed light on the patterns of knowledge creation, validation and use that lie at the core of the disciplinary matrix of popular management texts.

### 3.1 Projecting context in the text

One of the reasons of the marked current interest in scientific and academic language has been the growing acceptance of a constructionist paradigm for textual research. The once hegemonic and still influential objectivist approach regarded language as a largely neutral vehicle for ideational content. What is essential in texts, in this view, is the set of propositions that they—with a varying degree of detail and precision—embody. Constructionism, on the other hand, underscores the socially interactive character of communication (Thompson, 2001). Texts, even if monologic, are understood as communicative exchanges designed for a given purpose, such as the sharing of opinions or the establishment of common knowledge (Nystrand, 1986, 40).

Authors design their message in view of the audience they address, and choose their words to engage with its purposes, situation and culture.

As scientific writing was long regarded as the epitome of impersonal objectivity, it has offered a prime opportunity for applying this model, and many studies in academic and scholarly communication have effectively uncovered the lively interaction that animates all its genres, from research articles to textbooks and doctoral dissertations (Bazerman, 1989; Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1994; Myers, 1990; Swales, 1990). Rather than being decontextualised, asocial and autonomous (Pennycook, 2001), the communication processes involved in establishing, debating and legitimising knowledge are intimately tied to their specific contexts. Effective scientific texts accurately predict their intended readers' interests, beliefs and expectations (Hoey, 1988), and adjust their expression

to accommodate them. This shared knowledge becomes the common ground on which authors present their goals, attitudes and judgements, negotiating with their interlocutors a shared representation of the text's function and the manner of its performance.

Perhaps because these contextual aspects shaping writing are more conspicuous outside academic prose, the genres and fields lying at the edge of science have garnered less interest. Even though the belief in a single scientific method, so dear to early positivism, has been irredeemably abandoned on the light that disciplinary cultures have specialised aims, argument structures and norms for social behaviour (Becher, 2001; Toulmin, 1972), a set of common concerns clearly shape scientific practice: orientation to peer-discussion, highly institutionalised barriers to entry, and a dominant —if sometimes contested— ideology of universal laws, analytical procedures and controlled experimentation (Lewontin, 1991; Taylor, 1986).

#### Other

forms of communication skirt scientific practice without fully embracing these assumptions. Except for scientific popularisation, the study of which has received a significant impulse from the Public Understanding of Science movement, few of these have been subject to analogous analyses. There are significant bodies of research on the language of the professions —such as law, nursing, or management—, but little of it has focused on its specific patterns of knowledge-creating interaction. And the role of trade journals and books in the social construction of knowledge is still largely unknown.

This certainly has to do with the complex nature of knowledge in these fields of practice. Squires (2001, 2005) points out a number of traits that distinguish professional disciplines from research ones: a long period on on-the-job training towards professional certification, a marked behavioural component, a focus on outcomes, and a degree of contingency that requires practical craft, not only knowledge, from the practitioner. Although this account underestimates the degree to which craft and practical sense are indispensable for actual research

work (cfr., for example, Collins, 2001b), it provides a set of pointers that highlight the overall difference in the context of production between academic and professional texts, and the goals and focus that govern it.

This difference is bound to make itself manifest at the discourse level even more than at a propositional one. Bondi (2006, 51), for example, notes that areas such as finance fall simultaneously under the scope of “pure” sciences such as economics, applied academic disciplines such as Business Studies, and concrete professional practice. On the other hand, persuasive writing in each of these fields pursues very different interactional purposes. Academic communication contemplates an audience of (actual or potential) peers, whose investment in disciplinary matters can be taken for granted. Adjusting to this context, writers display their familiarity with local norms and criteria in order to construct a persuasive persona for their professional community (Hyland, 1998b, 440), while they explicitly acknowledge the disciplinary consensus to show respect for the community’s face (Swales et al., 1998, 98). However, there is nothing intrinsically persuasive in such strategies, and readers otherwise oriented are likely to have little appreciation for them. Pagel and Westerfelhaus (2005, 440) report on the frustration of manager readers who cannot find the theme in this constant “referencing one piece of research after another”.

Successfully exchanging information with readers entails framing communication so as to avoid such misunderstandings, and acknowledging their expectations is doubtlessly an essential part of such a framing. Authors, however, are not limited to a passive role. Effective writers reinforce their text with explicit interpretive cues designed to help readers find their way around them, and signal their own intentions, methods and stances through a wide range of devices, guiding the reader in the process of interpretation. They may, for example, use parenthetical redefinitions to simplify comprehension, *glossing* the text wherever they expect their readership to be unfamiliar with specialist lexis; explicitly break the flow of the text to project themselves and their opinions in brief asides; or facilitate the comprehension of its organisation through the judicious use of

previews and reviews.

Various disciplines and research programmes have engaged the description of these practices, variously called “reflexive”, “metacommunicative” or “metadiscursive”. In the following section, we review the influential models that have converged in contemporary approaches to metadiscourse in applied linguistics and discourse analysis.

### 3.1.1 The nature of metadiscourse

Metadiscourse is a notion as engaging as it is hard to pin down. Intuitively, the word suggests “discourse about discourse” and indeed definitions of the sort have cropped up in the literature sometimes (e.g., van de Koppe, 1985, 83). However, this adds little analytic clarity. As we have already noted, the term “discourse” is routinely used in a number of different, although related, meanings. “Aboutness”, in turn, does not fare much better, covering phenomena as different as word reference, propositional topic and illocutionary purpose. These problems have plagued much research on the topic, where several disciplines coincide and—sometimes—converge.

Closest to this intuitive meaning is a notion of metadiscourse as consisting of words and propositions that denote other elements in text, making use of the “capacity of natural language to refer to or describe itself” (Lyons, 1977, 5). Such a notion was prevalent in early studies in logic and philosophy of language, to whom we owe the notion of “metalanguage”. These were concerned with the effects of such references on the calculation of truth values, and paid little attention to natural language in use, but the notion soon caught the attention of more linguistically inclined researchers. In the earliest recorded use of the term, Harris (1957) adopted this referential criterion in designing techniques for automatic generation of content summaries for scientific text. He considered such self-referential statements to be extraneous to the gist of the matter, and his summarising technique would omit them. Essentially the same outlook underlay prescriptive guides for academic writers advising them to be moderate in their



use of metadiscourse, so as not to distract the reader from the essential meaning of the text.

The need for a broader notion soon became apparent, encompassing not only reference to the text itself but “all the elements in a sentence that refer to the process of discoursing, as opposed to the reference of the discourse” (Williams, 1981, 31), but this notion in turn proved problematic as broader studies in composition and Language for Specific Purposes sought to provide empiric contrast for traditional prescriptions. Classifications of metadiscourse adopted a functional basis, showing how authors made use of these resources to “guide and direct the reader, to signal the presence of the author, and to call attention to the speech act itself” (Crismore, 1989, 7), which seemed difficult to conflate with a definition based on denotational criteria. Although they helped establish the topic as a lively field of research in applied linguistics—with a clearly academic focus, dwelling on textbooks (Crismore, 1989; Hyland, 1999), undergraduate and graduate student papers (Bunton, 1999; Crismore et al., 1993), spoken academic communication (Heino et al., 2002; Recski, 2005), popular scientific writing (Crismore and Farnsworth, 1990) and especially on the research article, the star genre in academia (Hyland, 1998b, 2000; Mauranen, 1993a)—, these works often failed to clearly locate their concept of metadiscourse on either side of the semantics/pragmatics interface.

Mao (1993, 266ff) and later Hyland and Tse (2004) pointed out that using a semantic rather than pragmatic criterion for identifying metadiscourse leads either to extremely restricted definitions or inconsistencies. Vande Kopple (1985, 83) had suggested that, as metadiscourse does not “add propositional material but help our readers organize, classify, interpret, evaluate, and react to such material”, it should be regarded as “nonpropositional”: a separate layer of meaning, not possessing a truth value. However, metadiscursive remarks can indeed be assessed as propositions about the world. Both the participants in the communicative exchange and other voices they call up to define their text—such as quotations for sources—are referentially identifiable, and as subject to

propositional evaluation as any other lexical item. Mao (1993) notes, in a classic example, that it is both untrue and pragmatically infelicitous to call a statement a “hypothesis” if its contents are well-acknowledged in the context in which it is uttered. His call for a pragmatic foundation for identifying metadiscourse, based on its function of “establish[ing] interpersonal bonds and maintain[ing] intertextual context” (269), found favour, as most subsequent writing emphasised functional criteria.

Nevertheless, theoretical formulations for this line of work remained flimsy, and as late as 2004 Hyland and Tse (2004, 167; see also Hyland 2000, 111) would still define metadiscourse in practical terms as “the writer’s reference to the text, the writer, or the reader”, in stark contrast with their alleged intention to understand the phenomenon in purely pragmatic terms as “the linguistic resources used to organize a discourse or the writer’s stance towards either its content or the reader” (157). It is likely that this residual notion of reference was maintained in an effort to circumscribe the concept of metadiscourse to a manageable extent. Although the exact limits of what could be termed metadiscourse were never too precise (Swales, 1990, 188), using purely functional criteria brings in an overly wide arrange of features, some of which seem to have only a tenuous connection to the original notion of “discourse about discourse”. Thus, while phenomena such as explicit declarations of stance (e.g., “I presume that X”) have an overt metadiscursive flavour, the functionally equivalent “Presumably X” does not. Similar problems plague statements of certitude, traditionally called *hedges* and *boosters*, which can be realised both as explicit metadiscourse —“I am sure that X”, “It is unclear whether X”, etc.— or more indirectly through adverbs, idioms and similar resources, and many other devices not usually listed as metadiscursive.

The alternative between endorsing a semantic definition of metadiscourse, and therefore losing the explanatory potential of the notion, or embracing a functional one at the cost of dispensing with metadiscourse as a coherent category, seems so far unresolved in the applied linguistics literature, which has sought

alternatives in more restricted concepts such as engagement (Hyland, 2001) or appraisal (Martin, 2001; Martin and White, 2005). A theoretical solution to this impasse, however, may lie in a second strand of research on metadiscourse that has evolved separately for decades. Following the early work of Bateson (1955) and Goffman (1959, 1974) on the notion of frames —socially constructed schemata for interpreting the meaning of events— scholars in linguistic anthropology and communication have focused on metacommunication as part of the regulatory devices used to facilitate social interaction. The kind of encounters they favoured in their analyses —often oral and informal rather than specialised and professionally circumscribed— led them to a focus on the often indirect signals on which a coherent understanding of social events is grounded, and to the notion of indexicality as essential to understand this indirection.

Silverstein (1976) took up the notion of indexicality or deixis, long established in the linguistics literature, to explain how linguistic items communicate their social conditions without contributing to the literal reference of discourse. He distinguished referential indexing —where the denotational meaning of a lexical or sentential item depends on contextual cues, such as in the personal or demonstrative pronouns— and non-referential indexing, which conveys meaning through the conventional but well-established association between linguistic or paralinguistic cues and elements in the context. A high pitch in spoken discourse, for example, may index a female author without the need for any referential cues explicitly mentioning her femininity (Ochs, 1992). In fact, most forms of social interaction do not involve a denotationally explicit form of metadiscursive description, but rather an accumulation of non-referential indexes that progressively regiment the ongoing situation (Silverstein, 1992; Wortham, 2003). Conventional association between contextual notes and genres, participant identities, and stances are established either in repeated practice or ideological representation (Silverstein, 2003).

An indexical approach to metadiscourse allows one to understand how cues relate to the discourse event they evoke without resorting to denotational cri-

teria. In fact, analysis of communication across genres and cultures has shown that interlocutors only rarely employ explicit references to their actions, orienting to indexical cues often without awareness of their organisational function (Wortham, 2003, 191). “Whether to establish an equal or hierarchical affiliation, adopt an involved or remote stance, or choose a convivial or indifferent interpersonal tenor” (Hyland, 2005, 13) is not normally a matter explicitly discussed. In fact, it is an anomalous writer that calls their text or their authorial persona “friendly”. Stances are much more frequently indexed indirectly through a range of different features. The indexical use of linguistic cues is separate from its semantic content, allowing for metadiscursive usage of a broad —potentially unlimited— range of elements at all discourse levels. Furthermore, the conventional character of indexicality helps explain why metadiscourse patterns and usages are often intimately tied to the local culture of a given discourse community (Hyland, 1998b).

We argue that a comprehensive approach to metadiscourse focuses not on whether a textual element does refer to the world, but rather on whether it indexes a relevant element of the rhetorical frame —the representation of the discourse situation that underlies the collaborative process of interpretation (Haas, 1994, 48). We therefore adopt a definition of metadiscourse as the *linguistic indexing of the pragmatic context*, used to negotiate a shared understanding of the identities and motives of participants, the goals of the communicative situation, the function of each of its constitutive steps and the relevant background. Such frames may be more or less overt and thorough, with texts providing a varying degree of guidance as to the process of interpretation, but they are only exceptionally absent. Any sophisticated form of discourse, including argument, is crucially dependent on the elucidation this frame provides.

### 3.1.2 Models of metadiscourse

This conception of metadiscourse as an embedding of the context of interpretation replaces earlier views that regarded it as having a mainly text-organising

function. Enkvist (1975) and Mauranen (1993a, 8), for example, limited their notion of metatext to those devices that organise its propositional content: highlighting its structural sequence; emphasising coherence; or providing clarification. While these are doubtlessly integral to metadiscursive communication, other authors argued that close functional similarities merited the inclusion of a wider range of features, globally seen as marks of authors' evaluative attitudes towards the ideational content and their interlocutors (Schiffrin, 1980). These features were sometimes grouped under the name of *interpersonal* metadiscourse, while the former were labelled *textual* (vande Kopple, 1985, 186–187).

The distinction was influential, and shaped many of the subsequent models of metadiscourse, but it presents several difficulties. Barton (1995), for example, argued that textual devices such as connectives also serve interpersonal goals: they politely frame new claims in terms of the shared disciplinary consensus, and attend to the anticipated conflict presented by items that the reader would find jarring or unexpected. More generally, adopting a pragmatic perspective entails considering the organisational features of a text as dependent on the authors' anticipation of a specific audience and its needs for interpretive guidance. Textual moves such as sequencing or selective foregrounding are sensitive to the competence and background knowledge of the expected readership, as well as to their anticipated response to the authors' claims.

It would be prolix to detail all the different classifications of metadiscourse suggested in the literature. Among the influential ones, vande Kopple (1985) adopted a basically empirical approach, listing *text connectives* —comprising *sequencers*, *reminders*, *announcements* and *topicalisers*—, signalling the functional and semantic connection between text segments; *code glosses*, which aid in the interpretation of lexical items; *illocution markers*, announcing the kind of speech act performed; *validity markers* —*hedges*, *emphatics* and *attributors*—, which indicate the extent and form of the author's commitment to a proposition; *narrators*, which ascribe a statement to a third person; *attitude markers*, indicating appraisals other than certainty; and *commentaries*, explicit dialogic

interventions by the authorial voice.

Crismore et al. (1993) revised this classification significantly, mainly by fitting it within a global textual/interpersonal divide and reorganising several categories. Within textual metadiscourse they locate text connectives, renamed *textual markers*, and *interpretive markers*, comprising code glosses, illocution markers and announcements. To the interpersonal kind are ascribed hedges, emphatics and attributors, considered separately in this case, as well as attitude markers and commentaries. Narrators are folded into attributors. A subsequent revision by Hyland (1998b) further refined some categories, and yielded essentially the same schema described in Table 3.1. The distinction between textual and interpersonal elements would be abandoned later, however, in line with a stricter pragmatic focus. Following Thompson and Thetela (1995), Hyland and Tse (2004) argue that metadiscourse is an essentially interpersonal category. Whether signalling relations between textual items or the author's evaluation of a proposition, metadiscourse functions by engaging the audience's perception and understanding. Indexical reference to the properties of text become important only as means for eliciting a given understanding of the same by the readers.

Thompson and Thetela (1995) thus argue that the structure of text is always shaped by the author's anticipation of the reader's reaction, and is therefore unavoidably interactive. When such interaction is not made overt in the textual surface, it is nevertheless evoked by the writer's design of the information flow. The choice of whether or not to link two sentences with a logical connective, for example, depends on the presumed ability of the readers to recover this relation from the bare semantic content of the text— the prior information they bring to the construction of a mental model (van Dijk and Kintsch, 1983)— and the additional information provided by code glosses is also clearly governed by the extent of the lexical knowledge assumed. In both cases, including a metadiscourse item seeks to alleviate the potential discomfort of the reader without the need to explicitly portray the question/answer pattern that would be present

in actual interaction. They call such devices *interactive*, and while the term is less clear than would be desirable we preserve it in this paper for consistency. When, by contrast, the participants in communicative interaction are explicitly involved in the design of the text, we have *interactional* devices. These involve the projection of speech roles that unequivocally convey the personae of reader and writer, such as exclamations and questions, or the use of explicit appraisals: propositional attitudes, explicit evaluations, etc. While interactive resources quietly “help to guide the reader through text, [...] interactional resources involve the reader collaboratively in the development of the text” (Thompson, 2001, 58).

Research in linguistic anthropology and semiotics has not provided comparable taxonomies, but monographic studies show considerable overlap with these global categories. Among the best researched fields are the metadiscursive function of reported speech—that is, quotation— (Lucy, 1993), linguistic action verbs—the illocutionary and perlocutionary actions performed in discourse— (Verschueren, 2004), as well as a wide range of discourse markers indicating logical relation, interpersonal tenor and cognitive appraisal. Although this does not necessarily indicate theoretical compatibility, it suggests that the categories employed in applied linguistics may possess an acceptable degree of generality. Seeking to maximise the comparability of the current study with previous research on knowledge-making genres, we adopted the latest version of Hyland’s taxonomy (Hyland, 2005; Hyland and Tse, 2004), which is organised as follows:

Interactive metadiscourse devices control the flow of information, highlighting the structure of argument. Attending to the cognitive resources that readers are expected to bring to their interpretation of the text, this kind of metadiscourse reflects the writers’ strategic guidance to bring out selected meanings. Interactive resources include:

- *transitions*, which explicitly instruct the reader on the kind of semantic relations between claims and other utterances, such as addition, contrast and consequence;

Category	Function	Sample feature
<b>Interactive metadiscourse</b>		
Transitions	Express semantic relations between discourse steps	but / furthermore / however
Frame markers	Label or sequence stages in discourse	firstly / our aim is / to conclude
Endophorics	Refer to other elements in the text	see above / in Table 1
Evidentials	Signal the source of semantic content	X states / (X, 2000) / as described by X
Code glosses	Express the redefinition of semantic content	i.e. / that is to say / for example
<b>Interactional metadiscourse</b>		
Hedges	Signal a reduced commitment to a proposition	approximately / may / seems to be
Boosters	Signal an emphatic commitment	clearly / exactly / in fact
Attitude markers	Convey author's appraisal of propositional content	notably / fortunately / X disregards
Engagement markers	Refers to readers' rôle in discourse	we / my
Self-mentions	Refers to authors' rôle in discourse	consider / note / you can

Table 3.1: Metadiscourse schema for persuasive texts



- *frame markers* expressing the schematic structure of the rhetorical steps in discourse; these comprise stage labels, explicit topic shifters, illocutionary predicates and a variety of resources used to identify a part of the text with the social action it is performing; discourse, labelling stages, setting boundaries and announcing future development;
- *endophoric markers* that direct the reader to other elements in the textual bundle, be they linguistic or not, thus highlighting semantic relations that may be obscured by the syntagmatic arrangement;
- *evidentials* directing the reader to sources of information outside this specific text, or attributing the present utterance to a certain principal. Although these sources are usually evaluated (an interactional function) as well, simple indication contributes to the depiction of the relevant contextual frame for interpretation;
- *code glosses* that signal a restatement or redefinition of semantic content to make the author's communicative intention clear, even in the face of the limits of the readers' lexical stock.

Interactional metadiscourse, in turn, influences the degree and mode of personal engagement, both by explicitly addressing authors and readers as participants in discursive interaction, and by giving clear cues as to the appraisal of ideational material. They are not merely expressive of the writer's own stance, but rather seek to engage the expected beliefs and attitudes of readers, acknowledged by the judicious use of modalisation and other forms of linguistic politeness. Interactional resources include:

- *hedges* that qualify categorical assertions, and therefore withhold the author's full commitment to the proposition's certainty or exactitude. They are shaped by socially shared standards for proof and precision, as well as established patterns of argumentative interaction and personal competence;

- *boosters* that draw on similar considerations to emphasise the veracity of assertions, establishing the author's own face as a contestant and signalling shared assumptions about the world;
- *attitude markers* going beyond certainty to display a wide range of appraisal dimensions, highlighting importance, deontic obligation or desirability among others;
- *engagement markers* drawing the readers' own personas into the text, indicating their participation in the communicative exchange and straightforwardly directing their interpretive action;
- *person markers* thematising the contribution of the author's persona, depicting themselves and their team as part of the discourse process.

While this taxonomy seeks to impose an instructive and analytically fruitful order on data, it cannot begin to approximate the flexibility and complexity of natural language use. Even highly codified devices, such as standardised quotations or formulaic openings, often perform simultaneously in more than one category. Evidentiality and appraisal, for example, may go hand in hand and convey highly articulate meaning through verb and tense choice (Thompson and Ye, 1991). The varying scope of metadiscursive markers allows for their embedding into one another, leading to further complexity. An accurate understanding of metadiscursive resources, therefore, cannot rely on surface regularities of lexical and grammatical choice, but requires close attention to contextual nuances to identify discourse function. Identifying the rhetorical goals pursued by the author is of paramount importance in establishing whether a given item performs a metadiscursive function.

It may be ultimately futile to aspire to a definitive catalogue of these functions. After all, identifying metadiscourse on a functional basis entails making sure of "how language works to achieve certain *communicative purposes* for users" (Hyland, 2005, 24, emphasis in the original), but as analysts we do not possess any privileged access to the initial purposes of authors, nor to whether

these were actually accomplished in the interaction. Linguistic anthropologists have often underscored that delicate attention to the local context and the broader social frames is indispensable to ascertain what social properties are indexed by a linguistic feature (Duranti, 1985). Verschueren (1999, 187-188) points out that all language use requires a more or less conscious choice from the possible alternatives, where past voices are strategically incorporated or discarded. Therefore, “*all verbal communication is self-referential to a certain degree*” (emphasis in the original). Tracing a distinction at any given point is problematic and somewhat arbitrary, especially when complex resources such as evaluation are involved.

Definitely establishing the criteria for demarcation falls beyond the scope of this study. However, the fuzziness of boundaries should not obscure the fact that “relatively blatant instances of metatalk are abundant in natural discourse and readily observable empirically” (Craig, 1999, 28, n. 2). We now turn to a specific discussion of metadiscourse in persuasive prose, before presenting the results of our own survey of popular management writing.

### **3.1.3 Metadiscourse and persuasion**

While it seems clear that metadiscourse is intended to help locate the text as part of an interaction between reader and writer, it is less clear for whom is this help intended. Accounts of metadiscourse have alternately focused on reader- and writer-orientation. Vande Kopple (1985, 83), for example, foregrounded the desire to “guide readers as smoothly as possible through our texts and to help them construct appropriate representations of them in memory”. A similar point is made by Crismore et al. (1993, 40), who speak of aiding the reader to “organize, interpret, and evaluate the information given”.

However, even if reader concerns figure highly in the design and deployment of metadiscourse, they do so only by proxy. Readers have no direct part in the composition of the text. Such influence as they may wield comes about as the result of an authorial choice to accommodate their needs and accordingly adjust

the communicative strategy. As any other contextual elements, the expectations and endowments of readers affect discourse production only through the context model (van Dijk, 2006b) used by the author to anticipate the communicative situation.

In other words, readers exist only virtually in the composition of the text, as part of the author's prior assessment of the situation.<sup>1</sup> Authors, on the other hand, can leave palpable traces to be activated and bound into the context model used by the reader. The rôle of metadiscourse is precisely to ensure that this activity of contextualisation remains as closely tied as possible to authorial ideas of relevance.

If texts could be regarded as simply conveying information, the distinction would be of little interest outside research on the psychology of discourse processing, but this is far from the case. Authors studying metadiscourse have emphasised how its more specific functions —such as inducing neophytes into a disciplinary culture (Hyland, 1999), convincing peers to adjust their stock of knowledge (Kuo, 1999) or adding a new subtype to the familiar genre of annual reports (Skulstad, 2005)— deeply affect the kind of metadiscursive orientation they provide. In more general terms, communication is often *persuasive*, and authors are concerned with the perlocutionary efficacy of their text as much as with its intelligibility. Discourse is a part of broader social processes. And although mutual understanding is likely a shared goal in most communicative interaction, it cannot be assumed that other goals are necessarily common as well. Thus, this general constraint leads to high rates of metadiscourse use in persuasive prose.

Research in academic writing, for example, has sought to show how persuasion is underwritten by the attempt to project common goals and shared understandings through metadiscourse. As scientific practice is built upon lengthy training processes and barriers to entry that ensure a certain homogeneity among participants in the field, writers display their familiarity with local norms and criteria in order to construct a persuasive persona for their

professional community. Both background knowledge about the local academic culture and ostensible display of commonly accepted methods and linguistic practices can be used to endorse an author's claims to acceptability (Hyland, 1998b, 440). Other metadiscursive devices, such as hedges and evidentials, do not simply tone down assertions. They serve politeness functions by diminishing the threat posed by new claims, tying them back to the disciplinary consensus and explicitly acknowledging other members' insights (Swales et al., 1998, 98).

Metadiscourse in pedagogically-oriented genres is less concerned with acknowledging readers' potentially different interpretations, and more with shaping them according to the author's intentions. Nevertheless, proving writer ethos remains an important goal. As readers are not judged competent enough to assess the validity and relevance of claims on their own merit, textbooks and popularisation texts devote much space to showcasing the author's credentials (Crismore and Farnsworth, 1990). In an ideal case, this runs parallel to the reader's socialisation into the linguistic practices of the specific community. Acquisition of discourse competence is not always so smooth, however, and the rift in format between pedagogic and advanced materials is sometimes very large (Hyland, 1999, 6). Mauranen (1993b, 18) attributes the difficulty in simultaneously providing accurate guidance on both counts to the great difference in shared knowledge between peer-group and pedagogical communication.

Politeness strategies are also important in adverts and other promotional genres, where metadiscourse allows copywriters to mitigate the imposition of their text and pass it off as informative (Fuentes Olivera et al., 2001, 1305). Disclaimers and other hedges, for example, are used to preface potentially face-threatening acts. In other cases, the use of metadiscourse approaches manipulation and deceit. Hyland (2002, 550) notes that reader-engagement devices, such as questions, may draw on processing heuristics to hide assertions under the appearance of other grammatical forms. They lead readers to adopt a certain stance without making this intention ever explicit (531–532). Validity markers can also be used to “disguise biases, unsupported assertions, slight distortions,

or outright falsehoods as facts” (vande Kopple, 1985, 91).

## 3.2 An analysis of metadiscourse in popular management writing

### 3.2.1 Corpus and methods

The data for our analysis was sampled from the large corpus of works collected for this dissertation. This corpus was randomly sampled down to manageable proportion, for which introductory chapters were selected from 35 of these books. These were of uneven length, as natural text boundaries were respected. The overall word count came in at 389'270 tokens, averaging 11'122 words per chapter.

Automated scripts were employed to tag metadiscourse items, following the lists collated by Hyland (2000, Appendices 2 and 3). As surface signals are insufficient to establish whether an expression is being used metadiscursively without a qualitative analysis of context, these automated tags were then checked by the researcher. Additional items not covered by these lists were also identified as needed and added to the tally.

As previous works have noted (e.g. Crismore et al., 1993, 41), it is sometimes difficult to map precise functions to textual items. Certain metadiscursive marks are often presented in bundles. Evidentials, for example, often incorporate evaluative features typical of attitude markers. In these cases, items were marked as accomplishing both functions. Extracts of the text were then independently coded by a research assistant in order to measure reliability. A Cohen's  $\kappa$  coefficient of 0.83 indicated substantial inter-rater agreement.

Quantitative analyses of frequency were conducted to provide a first approach to the prominence and use of metadiscourse throughout these texts. As metadiscursive resources may have phrasal or higher scope, and often simultaneously perform both propositional and metadiscursive functions, frequency

<b>Category</b>	<i>n</i>	<b>Per 1'000 words</b>
Transitions	2'990	7.68
Frame markers	1'682	4.32
Endophorics	390	1.00
Evidentials	1'109	2.85
Code glosses	1'802	4.63
Interactive	7'973	20.48
Hedges	2'865	7.36
Boosters	7'583	19.48
Attitude markers	5'306	13.63
Engagement markers	4'543	11.67
Self-mentions	6'205	15.94
Interactional	26'502	68.08
<b>Total</b>	<b>34'475</b>	<b>88.56</b>

Table 3.2: Metadiscourse in popular management writing

counts show only the incidence and not the relative weight of metadiscourse within a stretch of text. For ease of comparison, all figures have been standardised to per mille ratios. The emerging patterns were then subjected to qualitative interpretation, seeking to account for the strategic concerns underlying the use of metadiscursive resources.

### 3.2.2 Quantitative results

Quantitative analyses reveal that the use of metadiscourse in popular management prose is remarkably different from that of academic writing. Not only does our corpus present a much higher overall frequency of metadiscursive elements than those previously reported—almost one instance every 11 words—, but the relative distribution of metadiscourse types is at significant variance as well. Table 3.2 presents a summary of frequencies, showing that interactional devices exceed interactive ones by almost three and a half times overall, with this prevalence being common to almost all subcategories. Transition markers are the only interactive feature appearing in comparable abundance, although still reduced in comparison to their importance in other genres.

### 3.2.3 Typical patterns

Interestingly, variations within the sample are sometimes very significant.<sup>2</sup> This suggests that the disciplinary matrix of management writing does not necessarily become manifest in rhetoric and formal uniformity. The use writers make of metadiscourse to set out an interpretive path for their readers and negotiate with them a rôle for interaction seems to be to no inconsiderable extent a matter of stylistic preference. Nevertheless, scores show that styles cluster around a number of well-defined prototypical forms, representing different orientations and tendencies in disciplinary practice.

One immediately recognisable group is formed by texts on leadership and personal development. These texts, largely oriented to enhancing the leadership abilities and attitudes of individuals, focus closely on readers' own experiences and desires, making very frequent appeals to their moral sense and to the authors' own experience of leadership situations. Thus, they cluster at the upper range of frequency for metadiscourse *tout court* and especially for interactional devices, displaying scores well above the mean for self-mentions, engagement devices and attitude markers, as in the following excerpt:

- (1) We all need to be ready for those moments when our leadership is on the line and the fate or fortune of others depends on what we do. Perhaps only a few people will be touched by the decisions that we make at such critical moments; perhaps many will. But either way, we need to be prepared if we are to seize the opportunity.

It is my view that one of the most effective ways of preparing for such challenges is by looking at what others have done when their own leadership was on the line. By examining their experience and asking what they did and what they could have done, and by wondering what you would have done yourself, you can better anticipate what you should do when faced with your own leadership challenges.

This book presents accounts of nine such experiences. (Useem & Bennis,



*The Leadership Moment)*

There is little doubt that the topic of leadership carries considerable interest for readers in management positions, and indeed most programmes in management training routinely include the subject. It is notable how the authors nevertheless make marked rhetorical efforts to establish this importance in the text, resorting mainly to personal engagement. Roles for both author and reader are projected in the text, framed in apparently equal footing as management practitioners. The choice of first-person plural pronouns instead of the impersonal or a detached third involves all participants in the communication as members of a professional community, well characterised in terms of goals, deeds and risks. In parallel, a distinction between author and reader, based on their relationship to the present text, is constructed, so as to foreground the pragmatic value it may hold for the audience. Remarkably, a good deal of professional knowledge and outlook is presupposed outright, leaving the reader to infer on their own the nature and scope of those moments and their own “leadership” —a topic with which we deal at greater length in chapter 6.

Not all texts on leadership follow this pattern —a significant exception is the voluminous *Leadership in Organizations* by Gary Yukl—, and not all texts that do deal specifically with this subject, but there is a clear correlation between concentration on the self and its discipline and a particularly heavy use of metadiscourse. These topics are seldom discussed without considerable involvement and explicit evaluation.

On the other hand, other subjects that are no less pressing for the involved executive enjoy a more detached description. Once the above texts are excluded, the remaining ones show a much more homogeneous pattern, where interactional functions remain predominant but shape less acutely the texture of discourse. The following excerpt nicely shows the difference in rhetorical strategy:

- (2) To be effective is the job of the executive. To effect. Whether he works in a business or in a hospital, in a government agency or in a labor union,

in a university or in the army, the executive is, first of all, expected to get the right things done. And this is simply that he is expected to be effective.

Yet men of high effectiveness are conspicuous by their absence in executive jobs. High intelligence is common enough among executives. Imagination is far from rare. The level of knowledge tends to be high. But there seems to be little correlation between a man's effectiveness and his intelligence, his imagination or his knowledge. Brilliant men are often strikingly ineffectual; they fail to realize that the brilliant insight is not by itself achievement. (Drucker, *The Effective Executive*)

The amount of guidance provided by the author is no less extensive in this excerpt, but it takes a very different character. A range of interactive devices clearly signpost the interpretive itinerary the reader is intended to pursue, from code glosses to transition markers. The author's personal assessment is put to the same effect, signalling his assessment of alternative explanations of these phenomena and carefully modulating the certainty and precision of his claims to remain at a pertinent level of informativeness. The main point of the text is thus presented in general, impersonal terms, detached from the intimate community of author and reader. Obviously, this assessment does not lack presuppositions—one of them, the stark sexism indexed by the masculine third-person pronouns, pointedly shows the degree of social change since the book's first appearance in 1959—, but the effort to make the structure of the main argument explicit is much more pronounced than in the previous text.

A third, and rather more marginal group within the corpus, consists of narrative texts possessing a clearly different rhetorical design. Narrative plays a very significant part in managerial literature, both in the form of examples and as an independent vehicle to present authorial credentials—devices we explore at further length in chapters 4 and 5. Nevertheless, its structural properties are entirely unlike those of argumentative text. In books such as Tracy Kidder's *Soul*

of a *New Machine*, the intent to familiarise the reader with the work environment of hi-tech start-ups necessarily takes a back seat to plot development, although it still receives explicit articulation in code glosses, evidentials and a smattering of attitude markers:

- (3) Now and then, a visitor will stand and gaze into a plastic case. It contains the bare bones of a story that will feed the dreams of any ambitious businessman. The First NOVA, reads a legend on the case. Inside sits a small computer, about the size of a suitcase, with a cathode-ray tube — a thing like a television screen — beside it. A swatch of prose on the back wall, inside the case, explains that this was the first computer that Data General ever sold. But the animal in there isn't stuffed; the computer is functioning, lights on it softly blinking as it produces on the screen beside it a series of graphs — ten years' worth of annual reports, a précis of Data General Corporation's financial history.

Left to their own devices, the engineers who worked in the basement of Building 14A/B could surely have produced a flashier display, but a visitor from Wall Street who had never paid attention to this company before might have felt faint before the thing.

### 3.2.4 Guiding interpretation through interactive metadiscourse

Interactive metadiscourse is primarily intended to signpost the process of interpretation, providing signals to orient readers where authorial expectations suggest the risk of ambiguity or opacity.

Metadiscursive devices bring the hidden structure of the text to light, foregrounding it for the benefit of the reader, who can then more easily identify the function of each of its parts. While reader and author remain absent from the text surface, their goals and their presumed knowledge become readily apparent through illocutionary predicates, code glosses and similar marks.

Previous research would suggest a relatively high incidence of this kind of metadiscourse in our corpus, as the need for explicit guidance often grows with the epistemic distance between author and reader. While collegial prose can count on an extensive stock of shared meanings and cognitive habits, asymmetries force the author to signal their intent and method as overtly as possible. The texts contained in our corpus are certainly designed for a wide public, where differences in previous knowledge and outlook are likely to be very significant, making it difficult to recover authorial intent from the bare semantic structure of the text. The markedly low frequency of interactive metadiscourse comes then as a surprise. With less than 8 signals per thousand words on average, textual connectives in our corpus are exactly 40 percent less frequent than in research articles intended for a peer audience (Hyland, 1998b) and more than three times less frequent than in pedagogical textbooks (Hyland, 2000).

It is clear, then, that the guidance authors offer to satisfy a potentially disaffected readership does not take the form of neatly structured argument, as it would in many other cases. This relatively anomalous development defies explanation unless the interpersonal potential evoked by transitions is taken into account. These devices do not only function to describe textual relations between clauses, but also contribute to the construction of rôles for participants and stylistically evoke other texts. We shall see that popular management readers are not averse to being issued directives, but nevertheless show a strong aversion to the features of what they consider to be the “academic” writing style, characterised among other traits by rich textual guidance (Pagel and Westerfelhaus, 2005, 429).

Writers may then partly forgo the use of transition markers to avoid projecting a professorial voice that would alienate their audience.

This does not mean that overt logical and rhetorical structuring are absent. On the contrary, insider commentaries on the genre point out that providing an explicit and distinct summary of one’s theses is often a prime concern of authors (Clark and Greatbatch, 2004, 412). Several metadiscursive devices seem

suited to fulfilling this function, among them frame markers. While transitions manage the pragmatic connections between propositions at a micro level, frame markers signal larger scale boundaries in the text's schematic structure. The density of these devices —jointly considering sequencers, illocution markers, text labels and topic shifters— seems broadly similar to that of academic prose, with more than one signal every 250 words. Sequencers, and lists in particular, play a key rôle in providing this sort of guidance. Their basically nonhierarchical nature allows authors to establish a global pattern for the content of their text without necessarily framing it in a systematic manner. Lists presenting the macropropositions act as powerful mnemonics and comprehension organisers as well.

Hempel and Degand (2006, 35) provide a paradigmatic description of the ideal sequence, comprising a descriptive introduction, a sequencer for each frame, and optionally an evaluative or summarising closing. Although this model is far from universal, and many instances fail to follow it to perfection, fully developed lists such as the one below were used in 45% of the texts in our corpus as succinct presentation of their main theses:

- (4) Because consumers are bombarded every day by more and more marketing messages, the challenge of establishing recall and recognition – and doing so economically – is considerable. Two factors are likely to be increasingly important as firms struggle with this challenge. First, given the resources required to create healthy awareness levels, a broad sales base is usually an enormous asset. [...] Second, in the coming decades, the firms that become skilled at operating outside the normal media channels – by using event promotions, sponsorships, publicity, sampling, and other attention-getting approaches – will be the most successful in building brand awareness. (Aaker, *Building Strong Brands*)

Classical logic since Aristotle holds that sequences that are not homogeneous

—i.e., that vary the basis for classification at some point— are defective in principle. However, in natural language use the converse may also apply: presenting items as part of a neatly structured sequence may lead readers to perceive them as structurally homogeneous and exhaustive even when they are not— especially when concepts and models are characterised by a high degree of generality and vagueness (Giroux, 2006). A semblance of symmetry between radically disparate notions is projected in the following excerpt through the use of sequencers:

- (5) The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. [...] That sums up the progress of an artful leader. (DePree, *Leadership is an Art*)

This text shows an interesting ambiguity between temporal and logical criteria. “Thank you” is a typical closing form for polite interactive exchanges, which would suggest that a chronological criterion may be at play; “progress” hints at the same. However, “defining reality” is unlikely to come as the temporal first step in any leadership process. “First” seems rather to be a logical or hierarchical description, equivalent to “foremost” or “main”. The impossibility to subsume both assertions under a coherent interpretation may be lost in the brisk textual development. No less marked are the shifts in classificatory and evaluative criteria that underlie the chapter as a whole.

Global text goals are often metadiscursively shown, either at the very beginning of a book —as in Excerpt (1)— or as the summarising evaluation of a narrative *incipit*:

- (6) The fundamental purpose of this book is to help people like Andrea, Fred, and John to be more effective in their jobs, and more successful in their careers – and then, through them, to help make their organizations more competitive, responsive, and responsible.

The focus of this effort is on a wide variety of leadership, power, and influence issues – issues that have been gaining increasing importance in

the past few decades. (Kotter, *Power and Influence*)

- (7) Just as both artists and scientists can develop their abilities, so too can leaders develop theirs: hence the purpose of this book.

The following chapters seek to aid the reader in developing as a leader.

These *incipits* themselves are a significant instance of a kind of devices that can be seen both as frame markers and as code glosses: exemplification signals. We deal with this topic at greater length in chapter 5, where different techniques for showing and using examples are examined. Briefly, examples can be signalled either through explicit labels (“for example”, “an instance of”), or through comparatives that indicate semantic relations of analogy between content elements. Both kinds of devices feature prominently in our corpus, constituting the bulk of frame markers, as in these excerpts:

- (8) [W]e think that content owners tend to be too conservative with respect to the management of their intellectual property. The history of the video industry is a good example. (Shapiro & Varian, *Information Rules*)

- (9) Information businesses —like those in the print, music, and movie industries— have devised various strategies to get wary consumers to overcome their reluctance to purchase information before they know what they are getting.

Examples help indicate the goals and importance of a text by highlighting its incidence in professional practice, one of the main strategies for justification in practitioner-oriented genres (Lemke, 1998b). However, they provide at the same time elaboration for its contents, which makes Hyland (1998b, 2000) includes them among the code glosses. In the present study, those signalled by labels that explicitly mark the nature of a rhetorical step following a discourse shift were listed among the former. Code glosses, of which 4.63 were found per 1'000 words, comprised mostly reformulations and redefinitions, which are rarer in our

corpus than in academic writing. Conventional Latinate signals (“i.e.”, “e.g.”), in fact, are almost entirely absent. The glosses presented sometimes introduce the reader to technical terms in economics or financial jargon, but almost as often provide instructions to apply more general concepts to a specific setting. The following excerpts respectively illustrate each function:

- (10) [M]uch of what they made was considered “negative value added.” That is, a tractor made by a Russian factory was so bad it was actually worth more as scrap metal, or just raw iron ore, than it was as a finished, Russian-made tractor. (Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*)
- (11) In a speech at the November 1996 Comdex computer show, Intel Chairman Andrew Grove declared, “We need to look at our business as more than simply the building and selling of personal computers [that is, goods]. Our business is the delivery of information [that is, services] and lifelike interactive experiences.” (Pine & Gilmore, *The Experience Economy*)

This last excerpt also shows one of the frequent cases in which *evidentials* reach out to the world of professional practice to provide a firmer grounding to authorial assertions. In fact, except for the very occasional reference to a fellow guru, most quotes involve managers and consultants as sources of guidance. In line with the above-mentioned bias against academicism, standardised formal citations (both parenthetical references and numerical superscripts) are entirely absent and reference to sources is rarely complete, much like the articles in the management trade journal described by Hemais (2001, 53). When the quoted source is a book, reference is always made by title alone. When, equally as often, the source is journalistic or a verbal communication, the given information is often insufficient for the curious reader to unambiguously locate the original text. This effacing of the specific source of the quotation may help project it as a generalised experience. As Semin and Fiedler (1988) point out, descriptions



<b>Source</b>	<i>n</i>	<b>% of total</b>
Managers	440	39.67
Academic and scientific texts	144	12.98
Literary and religious texts	118	10.64
Political and legal texts	66	5.95
Self-mention	54	4.86
General press	41	3.69
Unknown or unspecified	245	22.09
<b>Total</b>	<b>1'109</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Table 3.3: Sources for evidentials in popular management writing

at a higher level of generality help produce an expectation of future repetition, suggesting this is a case of a broader tendency that readers are likely to meet themselves.

The effects of this imprecision are not always problematic. The interested reader will not find it especially hard to determine that Stephen R. Covey's misquotes Emerson in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, although in a manner fairly faithful to the original.<sup>3</sup> It is more difficult to ascertain the exactitude of the quotations from chairpersons, business analysts and line managers that make up the bulk of the presented evidence, as shown in Table 3.3.

Self-citation is rarer than it would seem expectable, given the strong predilection of management gurus to spread out their doctrines over multiple materials (Clark and Greatbatch, 2004, 415), as well as the prominent role of self-projection, to which we come back in the next section. It is to be supposed that the context of practice disfavours this resource, as readers do not expect to be referred to a disciplinary context (cfr. Hyland and Tse, 2004, 171), but rather to hear the latest in technique, with significant novelty value. Rather than referencing previous research, authors are supposed to provide signals of practical relevance, and indeed when they represent themselves it is often as involved practitioners rather than as writers. Quotations, therefore, tend to voice the concerns and opinions of insiders who have privileged access to business settings and activities through belonging to professional groups.

Some texts, however, markedly deviate from this pattern to buttress their

thesis in a thick network of quotations. This is especially frequent in leadership texts, where the difficulty in giving a precise meaning to this vague notion often leads to a collection of disparate approaches rather than to systematic delimitation, as in this excerpt:

- (12) Leadership has acquired nearly as many incarnations as there are analysts and consultants. For historian James MacGregor Burns, leadership is a calling. For Peter Drucker, leaders are those whose followers “do the right thing.” For Abraham Lincoln, leadership appealed to the “better angels of our nature.” (Useem, *The Leadership Moment*)

It is important to note that quantitative similarities in quotation frequency should not obscure profound differences in usage patterns. The community of managers does not require writers to signal an allegiance to disciplinary channels of communication and make explicit their participation in specialist dialogue through institutionalised mention of parallel research. Especially when dealing with topics at the less quantitative end of the business spectrum, the difficulty in making or even imagining precise measures and controlled variables for observation places any form of systematic analysis very far from the practical concerns and habits of practitioners.

The rhetorical practices thus favoured do not fall squarely in either of the “soft” or “hard” camps described by Becher (2001) for academia, but rather develop orthogonally to that divide in order to address the needs of professional practice (Squires, 2005). After all, notions of comparability and generalisation are less likely to intuitively appeal to readers who cannot, in their professional routine, repeat a specific intervention in broadly similar circumstances, but have to do with contingent factors. The usage of quotation in these texts does not therefore seek to protect discourse from misinterpretation or ambiguity, but precisely to provide formulations with a mobilising potential, while they remain ambiguous enough to accommodate a number of various contexts of use (Benders and van Veen, 2001; Thomas, 2003). Hence the extremely general

choices of quotation material such as those in the previous example, or the highly moral yet platitudinous tone of some literary quotes:

- (13) The Psalmist expressed our conviction well: “Search your own heart with all diligence for out of it flow the issues of life.” (Covey, “The 7 Habits. . .”)

The least frequent form of interactive metadiscourse are endophorics, which are in fact entirely absent from a sizeable proportion of texts. This seems predictable in light of the findings from academic prose, where this resource characterises the writing of the hard disciplines. There, constant cross-referencing across semiotic modes gives argumentation its characteristic texture (Lemke, 1998a). Management texts sometimes borrow these conventions, via the rhetorical practices of economics, and make use of figures for illustration and (quantitative) evidence:

- (14) The study looked at American Express, AT&T, Avon, Citicorp, Coke, Kodak, Ford, Goodyear, IBM, Kellogg’s, and 23 other firms for which the corporate brand drove a substantial amount of sales and profits. Figure 1-6 portrays the relative impact of changes in perceived quality and ROI on stock return. (Aaker, *Building Strong Brands*)

These, however, are far more reminiscent of the standardised graphs customarily used in business and financial analysis, which require little knowledge beyond basic mathematical training, than of the sophisticated figures employed in the hard sciences.

Also frequent are references to inset tables providing quick summaries of conceptual differences or overviews of classificatory schemata. Cross-references to arguments developed elsewhere in running text are infrequent, adding up to slightly less than 20% of endophoric cases. This seems consistent with the largely unstructured discursive style, where attempts to locate specific argu-

ments within the overall structure are rare.

### 3.2.5 Projecting an authorial persona

As we move out of the disciplinary paradigm of interaction espoused by the academic disciplines and more directly present the engagement of author and reader as a face-to-face relationship, the relative weight of interactional elements becomes greater. In interactional metadiscourse, the experience of the ongoing discourse situation comes to the fore directly, addressing participants and explicitly signalling their perspectives, orientations and interests. These elements are directly involved in constructing a subject for the enunciation —what Campbell (1975) calls a *persona*— as well as encoding a set of guidelines for the reader-in-the-text that prepare for its main persuasive goal. In our corpus, the importance of interactional elements is made patent by their sheer prevalence, making up just over three quarters of all metadiscourse— one signal every fifteen words.

Much research on metadiscourse has focused on the complex interplay between assuredness and deference that fuels the use of hedges and boosters. In the process of transforming an observation or a thought into a full-fledged fact or theory, negotiation with interlocutors is indispensable. No matter what the degree of assurance intimately held by the speaker, what is actually important in discursive interaction is to what extent this assurance can be shared by readers in view of their previous stock of knowledge, their inclinations and the credibility the author holds in their eyes. Building a rapport with them requires honouring these preliminary understandings. At the same time, commanding the readers' attention and —even more so— their commitment to a given course of action involves building a solid basis of certainty which is unlikely to come about unless the author begins by signalling their own. Sophisticated strategies are thus required to show a proper degree of deference towards the alternate views possibly held by readers, appropriate attention to the potential negatability or inaccuracy of one's own grounds, and the required degree of newsworthiness and solidity to attract readership.

Myers (1989) is credited with the hypothesis that politeness is useful as a model for analysing hedging and boosting in disciplinary discourse, viewing argumentation as a form of negotiation where both readers' faces and the author's own are at stake. It has already been mentioned, however, that circumspection and caution are not necessarily prized traits in management writing. While standard representation of research and scientific writing place objectivity and well-foundedness at the forefront of the professional endeavour, this is clearly tied to collective objectives based on the orderly accumulation of knowledge and the conventional development of professional careers based on provable contribution to this stock.

When, in contrast, reading goals are dictated by the quest for "action plans that the general populace can grab hold of, understand, and become a part of" (Pagel and Westerfelhaus, 2005, 429), this desirable buffer of negotiation space often becomes a rather inconsiderate attempt to lose the audience's time in irrelevant disquisitions. Texts in our corpus are blunt in their approach to their theses, providing less than half the hedges per 1'000 words than research articles and even less than textbooks, which have been noted for their proclivity for unmitigated assertion (Latour and Woolgar, 1986). Conversely, boosters appear with spectacular density: they represent the single most frequent kind of metadiscursive device, reaching almost one item per 50 words on average.

Such a distribution suggests that reader-oriented strategies in professional writing appeal to values markedly at variance with those of academics. The social processes in which popular management writing is embedded make this expectable. While in scholarly communication readers are assumed to show commitment to a topic of their own accord, regardless of the specific virtues of a text, we have seen in chapter 2 that this is far from the case for popular authors, whose works are selected, consumed and appraised by readers intent on practical goals. Getting the attention of the audience and maintaining it throughout, especially by convincing it of the importance of the ideas presented, is a prime concern. As a result of such contextual differences, promotional needs occupy

a far more central place. These needs are compounded by the simultaneous presence of a number of different paradigms and currents in popular writing, which are often short-lived and cannot therefore rely on cumulative proof of importance or relevance (Abrahamson, 1996).

Boosters can underscore the validity of the presented claims in several ways. In their barest form (“very”, “much”), they simply emphasise the association between evidence and interpretation by emphatically asserting its objective status. In other cases, they provide a positive appraisal to the process that led to this claim, selecting a factive (Kiparsky and Kiparsky, 1970) verb for its description (“prove”, “show”). Finally, they may assertively present certain outcomes as unequivocal, accentuating the value of their statements for prediction (“will”), or underscore the extent of their application through an explicit universal quantifier. The following excerpt shows typically dense boosting:

- (15) Today, multimedia is a desktop or living room experience, because the apparatus is so clunky. Even laptops, with their clamshell design, do not lend themselves to being very personal information appliances. This will change dramatically with small, bright, thin, flexible high-resolution displays. (Negroponte, *Being Digital*)

The primary focus of boosters in our corpus is placed on certainty, not exactitude—which would run counter to the lax overall structure we have already mentioned. The most usual is predictive “will”, which appears 1’178 times, often clustered with other devices to provide intensely emphatic depictions of the future:

- (16) What this means is that chips are becoming cheap and tiny enough to slip into every object we make. Eventually, every can of soup will have a chip on its lid. Every light switch will contain a chip. Every book will have a chip embedded in its spine. Every shirt will have at least one chip sewn into its hem. Every item on a grocery shelf will have stuck to it, or embedded within itself, a button of silicon. There are 10

trillion objects manufactured in the world each year and the day will come when each one of them will carry a flake of silicon. (Kelly, *New Rules for the New Economy*)

Factive research verbs —such as “prove” or “demonstrate”— are significantly less frequent, with the sum of all forms adding up to only 648 instances, approximately one every 600 words of running text. One interesting case is that of attributive “true”, meaning “real” or “genuine”. Over 70% of its 135 appearances come from leadership texts, where a concern with authenticity is paramount.

The above does not entail that management texts are one-dimensional in their promotional intent. While the readership they address does not approach their findings with the kind of critical caution an academic peer-group would, they may be quite capable of judging the practical usefulness of the models and theories presented. Engagement and attitude markers play a significant part in mustering adhesion, but before turning to those overtly interpersonal resources, it should be noted that hedges often appear clustered with boosters to provide a more nuanced textual development. While the overall tone is doubtlessly assertive, both attribute and source hedges serve to soften the imposition this represents on the readers’ face. They are often skilfully blended with heavily emphasised patterns to open avenues for textual development and protect authors from the accusation of excessively idiosyncratic interpretation:

- (17) Why was it that firms that could be esteemed as aggressive, innovative, customer-sensitive organizations could ignore or attend belatedly to technological innovations with enormous strategic importance? In the context of the preceding analysis of the disk drive industry, this question can be sharpened considerably. The established firms were, in fact, aggressive, innovative, and customer-sensitive in their approaches to sustaining innovations of every sort. But the problem established firms seem unable to confront successfully is that of downward vision

and mobility, in terms of the trajectory map. Finding new applications and markets for these new products seems to be a capability that each of these firms exhibited once, upon entry, and then apparently lost. It was as if the leading firms were held captive by their customers, enabling attacking entrant firms to topple the incumbent industry leaders each time a disruptive technology emerged. (Christensen, *Innovator's Dilemma*)

At the boundary between boosters and attitude markers, claims about interest-worthiness are intended to guide the readers' response, aligning it with authorial prescription. While in principle attitude markers convey the personal assessment the author makes of a given situation, persuasive writing is far removed from conversational exchange, where views are presented for amicable discussion, enjoyment or self-expression. Rather, they are intimately bound with presenting a convincing case that will align the reader's outlook with the one presented. Clearly showing the continuity between interactive and interactional features, they often perform in an overtly interpersonal manner many of the functions that transitions indirectly convey, such as focusing the readers' attention in specific elements of the propositional content.

Of course, making explicit, unmodified assertions about the readers' own intentions and desires is very much a face-threatening act, but the author may project these through an embedded textual rôle, animating a reader voice that the reader is invited to identify with. In the following excerpt, "not surprisingly" has effectively substituted for a logical link like "therefore" without any loss of intelligibility. Instead of making logical consequence explicit, the author shows that this inference can be taken for granted by constructing a virtual reader that has found it unsurprising. By bringing out the management of information in interactional terms, concern with the readers' interpretation of the text is foregrounded, adding a solidarity element to discursive structuring:

(18) Now that information is available so quickly, so ubiquitously, and so



Verbal lemma	<i>n</i>	Per 1'000 words
Must	278	0.71
Have to	259	0.67
Should	246	0.63
Need to	217	0.58
Ought to	3	0.01
Total	1003	2.58

Table 3.4: Deontic modals as attitude markers

inexpensively, it is not surprising that everyone is complaining of information overload. (Shapiro & Varian, *Information Rules*)

The most conspicuous of attitude markers, however, are deontic modals, which overtly express a normative view of action and unambiguously suggest the authors' authority to guide readers in their own example. These comprise almost one fifth of all tokens of this sort, with 1003 instances distributed as shown in Table 3.4. Deontics explicitly index the participants' goals and duties, projecting them as morally responsible agents (Lyons, 1977, 823) and stating the contextual constraints according to which their action is interpersonally evaluated. At the same time, they assign clearly demarcated roles to authors, as authoritative advisers and lawmakers, and readers as recipients of said advice.

Hyland (1999, 2000) notes that relational markers are much more frequent in textbook writing than in research articles, a trend taken to an extreme in our corpus, where they are one and a half times as usual again. These markers expressly indicate a position for the reader, be it in terms of the action to be performed, the doubts to be experienced, or the characteristics to be possessed. This allows the author to conflate participation in a language event — as recipient of a message — with a number of other rôles, those occurring in the situation that the propositional content projects. And while the former is a given by the mere act of participating in the communicative exchange, readers may not readily accept the further rôles in which they are depicted. Nevertheless, they become part of the expectations embedded into the interactional structure of the text and required for its effective use (Thompson and Thetela, 1995).

In chapter 6 we examine how these expectations are used to construct a reader position couched in a number of presuppositions provided by the author. Here, on the other hand, our focus is on explicit signals constricting the readers' role. Deontic verbs, especially when coupled with second-person pronouns, forcefully suggest the superior competence of the author in distinguishing appropriate from undesirable or mistaken action. The exclusive use of "you" —as opposed to its impersonal or indefinite form— underscores this polarity:

- (19) *we* systematically introduce and explain the concepts and strategies *you* need to successfully navigate the network economy. (Shapiro & Varian, *Information Rules*)

The same effect can be obtained through overt imperatives, which enact an asymmetric relation of power, positioning the reader in a subordinate rôle to the superior authority of the writer. Here the basically symmetrical interaction of academics leaves the stage to a hierarchical relationship of guidance stemming from superior experience or more profound "vision". In some cases, as in the introduction to Bill Gates' *Business @ the Speed of Thought*, the text is expressly organised around a list of directive statements, each having an explicitly modalised prescription as its corollary:

- (20) **6. Use digital tools to eliminate single-task jobs** [...] Give your workers more sophisticated jobs along with better tools, and you'll discover that your employees will become more responsible and bring more intelligence to their work. One-dimensional, repetitive work is exactly what computers, robots and other machines are best at— and what human workers are poorly suited to and almost uniformly despise. In the digital age, you need to make knowledge workers out of every employee possible. (Gates, *Business...*)

Rhetorical questions are less marked in their directive character. They have

been elsewhere described as egalitarian in stance, bringing readers into a dialogue with the experiences of the discipline (Webber, 1994, 264), and certainly they may embody such an interactional strategy. In these lines, for example, questions illuminate the motivations and assumptions guiding the research process:

- (21) Why do so many companies die young? Mounting evidence suggests that corporations fail because their policies and practices are based too heavily on the thinking and the language of economics. [...] I was inspired to research and write this book to learn, distill, and share the success sustainability lessons of great service companies. Despite the perils posed by time, growth, and success, some service companies keep getting better. How do the Charles Schwabs, Enterprise Rent-A-Cars, and Chick-fil-A's do it? I anticipated that these long-time achieving companies would share certain traits in common but also would differ in certain respects, if only because the particulars of their businesses were different. (Berry, *Discovering the Soul of Service*)

Interrogation here frames the reader at the author's side in the search for a solution to a certain cognitive dissonance. While the possibility of altering the eventual destination is merely fictional, the reader can at least appreciate the difficulties of the route, and the junctures at which an alternative course may be chosen. But this is far from their only use. It has been observed that questions—and marked moods in general, that is, deviations from basic declarative statements—markedly impose on the reader by setting up conversational expectations, and demanding a preferred response to maintain the smooth flow of interaction (Lemke, 1992, 86). Questions may thus also serve to ostensibly anticipate the readers' thoughts, showcasing the author's insight into their motivation and the shared knowledge of their situation. Such is the case of the following excerpts, where this anticipation is used to dramatic effect:

- (22) Joe Ricketts, even told Business Week this: “I can see a time when, for a customer with a certain size margin account, we won’t charge commissions. We might even pay a customer, on a per trade basis, to bring the account to us.” An absurdity? Only if one fails to recognize that any shift up to a new, higher-value offering entails giving away the old, lower-value offering. (Pine & Gilmore, *The Experience Economy*)
- (23) As the century closed, the world became smaller. The public rapidly gained access to new and dramatically faster communication technologies. Entrepreneurs, able to draw on unprecedented scale economies, built vast empires. Great fortunes were made. The government demanded that these powerful new monopolists be held accountable under antitrust law. Every day brought forth new technological advances to which the old business models seemed no longer to apply. Yet, somehow, the basic laws of economics asserted themselves. Those who mastered these laws survived in the new environment. Those who did not, failed. A prophecy for the next decade? No. (Shapiro & Varian, “Information Rules”)

In both these cases the strategy for meaning-making depends on the author adopting two different *personae*. By playing the part of answerer to their own questions, a rôle model for the desired reader is set in advance. Readers are required to accept, however provisionally, the position that the textual frame construes for them in order to coherently interpret the text (Thompson and Thetela, 1995, 18).

The text’s semblance of interaction, however, does not alter its fundamentally monological nature. Insidiously, this appearance may be used with persuasive intent, suggesting to novice readers that these are the sort of questions they *should* ask of themselves and encouraging them to accept this as a valid model of reasoning (Thompson, 2001, 61). Leading readers through a process of interpretation, questions provide an ideal model for indoctrination them into

a specific professional culture.

Perhaps the least imposing strategy is to present a shared identity between speaker and writer through the use of inclusive first-person plural forms, where normative concerns are expressed in a seemingly objective manner by drawing on shared knowledge and highlighting ways of being and doing that are common to author and reader (Fairclough, 2003b):

(24) As *we* see, many strategies for purveyors of information are based on the fact that consumers differ greatly in how they value particular information goods. [...]

The main reason that *we* read the Wall Street Journal today is that *we've* found it useful in the past [...]

in every industry *we* see dramatic changes in technology that allow people to do more with the same information. (Shapiro & Varian, "Information Rules")

Interestingly, inclusive expressions are seldom limited to the actual readers and writers. In the second item in the above excerpt, "we" does not designate a specific set of interactants, but rather the well-characterised community of readers of the Wall Street Journal. In the third one, "we" also brings together all those concerned with the technology of managerial processes. Although the writers do not position themselves as carriers of a message whose authority rests on the discourse community, shared membership in a broader group is highlighted in both cases, reaching out to the readers' imagined participation in it for interpretation.

On the other hand, personal pronouns can play a significant rôle in building an image of certainty, assurance and personal compromise by foregrounding the presence of the writer in the text Hyland (2000, 123). Far from the conventional *pluralis modestiae*, "we" is a strongly persuasive resource in these lines:

(25) As academics, government officials, and consultants *we* have enjoyed

<b>Pronoun</b>	<i>n</i>	<b>Per 1'000 words</b>
First-person singular	2'774	7.12
First-person plural	3'435	8.82
Second-person	2'406	6.10
Indefinite	185	0.46
Total	8'800	22.50

Table 3.5: Personal pronouns

a bird's-eye view of the forest for twenty years, tracking industries, working for high-tech companies, and contributing to an evergrowing literature on information and technology markets. [...]

*We* wonder how many investors who bid Netscape's stock price up to breathtaking heights appreciated its fundamental vulnerability. [...]

*we* think that content owners tend to be too conservative with respect to the management of their intellectual property [...]

*We* firmly believe the models, the concepts, and the analysis will provide you with a deeper understanding of the fundamental forces at work in today's high-tech industries. (Shapiro & Varian, "Information Rules")

Table 3.5 presents an overview of pronoun usage in our corpus. Obviously, a quantitative account of that kind cannot reflect the different usages above described, but it makes evident some interesting patterns. The quantity of personal markers is very high in comparison with academic writing. Overall rates are more than eight times greater than those found by Hyland (2000, 114) for textbooks, and even if other reports have yielded higher counts than his (Kuo, 1999, 125, reported about 8.3 pronouns of the kind we address per 1'000 words in "hard" scientific articles), some important differences remain, especially as regards the second person, which is over 55 times more frequent in our corpus than in Kuo's.

### 3.3 Discussion

In this chapter, we have explored the lexical and grammatical resources fulfilling metadiscursive functions in a body of popular management writing, arguing that the analysis of their structure sheds light on the social actions that they routinely accomplish. Rather than regarding writing as a primarily individual act that seeks to express pre-existing meanings, we view it as radically social, deriving its meaning from participation in a network of communicative acts and inseparable from the participants taking place in it and the institutions it inhabits.

Metadiscourse offers a privileged window into this context. The metadiscursive use of discourse features brings to light the process of negotiation that authors undertake as an inseparable part of meaning-making. By showing how writers position themselves, their audiences and the broader disciplinary background within the text, it exposes the embedded norms for interpretation. We hypothesised that such positioning, as performed in popular management literature, would differ markedly from the standard set by previous research in scientific writing.

This difference is indeed apparent even at a broadest level of analysis; while in scholarly texts—and indeed in most kinds of writing where metadiscourse has been explored—explicit personal engagement takes a back seat to the partially depersonalised control of interpretation, popular management texts bear the strong imprint of authorial identity. Not only is metadiscourse more densely employed overall, but also interactional features are significantly more common than elsewhere. Quantitative data show that authors forcefully and pervasively make their own identity visible throughout the text, projecting themselves, communicating personal appraisals and generally foregrounding their own experiences and judgements rather than any form of disciplinary consensus. At the same time, they provide a strongly binding model for their readers, through the use of explicit assessment and second-person pronouns.

This seems of particular importance in light of the peculiarities of manage-

ment practice. Management may share a number of traits with the traditional professions —law, medicine or engineering—, but unlike them there is no established professional body to give it a common background, homogeneous training and a global unifying paradigm. Research networks and practice communities are less homogeneous and more labile than in prototypical professions. Models quickly gain approval and are often as quickly discarded, in a pattern some have viewed as analogous to that of fashion (Abrahamson, 1991). There is therefore little chance to appeal to an enlightened consensus, and the rôle of the author as expert and even guru takes a more central place.

Theorists embracing the fashion model have tended to describe popular management writing as an inferior epigone of “real” scientific practice. This view seems overly simplistic, as the functions that popular writing seeks to engage are very much different from those of scholarly prose. Rather than devising a systematic framework for interpretation and weaving one’s contributions into the broad tapestry of disciplinary standards, popular authors are more concerned with driving readers to —often immediate— action. Even if the highly personalised tone echoes that of early modern science, where genteel explorers related their own experiences to an audience of their peers (Bazerman, 1989; Swales, 1990), the strong pedagogic tone and the insistence on the readers’ personal character markedly separates it from any kind of scholarly communication.

It would perhaps seem more fruitful to understand this set of features as part of a process of synthetic personalisation (Fairclough, 1989), where direct appeals to the reader are intended to cultivate a feeling of intimacy. Personal pronouns and emphatic address evoke a situation of direct, friendly contact between individuals that may serve to bypass the absence of a disciplinary network. However, a robust account in this terms would require going beyond the texts themselves to analyse their actual contexts or production and consumption. This calls for ethnographic methods that enable a distinction between the actual and potential processes of meaning-making, drawing on thick descriptions to assess the real effects of discourse upon social action. Our intention in this



chapter is more limited. We have simply sought to identify how norms for interpretation are suggested through the embedded framework of metadiscursive features. This is not a transparent description of disciplinary practice: texts have their own intent, irreducible to shared norms, and skew their representation of actual reading processes for their own purposes. The likely variation in uses made even within a single discourse communities is thus glossed over.

Using a standard classificatory model provides a useful means for highlighting how these repeated rhetorical choices contrast with those of another genres and samples. At the same time, it straitjackets the wide variety of metadiscursive resources into a set of sometimes arbitrary choices. The difficulty is compounded when, as in most of the applied linguistics literature, ethnographic precautions are not systematically taken in the construction of categories, and no definite theoretical models underwrite the search for empirical regularities. A thoroughly developed theory of metadiscourse as the linguistic encoding of context should take as its basis a robust theory of context, a task that has remained largely untackled (but see van Dijk, 1997a, 2006b), and the effects of choice between explicit reference and nonreferential indexicality should be more thoroughly assessed. But looking at the regularities in rhetorical choices provides a solid ground for the exploration of interpretive preferences, and to specialised communication as a socially constructed form of praxis.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>This consideration is not particular to monological genres. Even though interlocutors in interactive forms of communication may of course directly affect the course of communication, a large number of phenomena associated with orality and interactivity, such as self-correction and continuous adjustment, are better explained by the ongoing modulation of the speaker's context model than by direct action on the part of listeners. Short of physical action, whatever a participant does only impinges on communication insofar as it is perceived,

interpreted and integrated into the situation model by the other involved parties.

<sup>2</sup>Previous research has not reported measures of dispersion, so it is unknown how do texts in other genres behave in this regard, but the coefficient of variation (that is, the result of dividing standard deviation  $\sigma$  by the mean score  $\mu$ ) was consistently high in our data. It showed values above 0.5 for all interactive devices except code glosses, and for all interactional ones except boosters, and reached 1.37 for evidentials.

An unfortunate effect of this scarcity of full statistical data is that the significance of the observed differences cannot be tested. In the absence of significance measures, all quantitative comparisons remain a heuristic tool for suggesting analyses, as a simple difference between means does not by itself assert the existence of actual systematic variations.

<sup>3</sup>Whether by design or mistake, he rephrases Emerson's popular quote from *Letters and Social Aims* (1876) slightly in order to make it more amenable to contemporary preferences about rhetoric: the original "Don't *say* things. What you *are* stands over you the while, and thunders so that I cannot hear what you say to the contrary" is more grave and wordy than the simplified "What you are shouts so loudly in my ears I cannot hear what you say" Covey offers.

## Chapter 4

# Narratives of success and personal experience

This chapter seeks to explore the multiple uses of narrative accounts of personal experience in popular management texts. The multiple positions the writers construct for themselves in narrating their past —as authors, evaluators and actors— are examined to shed light on the social functions that narratives accomplish. While socialising and professional duties are often imagined as distinct activities, narratives skilfully weave both in order to engage audiences and construct an expert identity.

Narratives have been the focus of much research at the interface of social and linguistic concerns. On the wake of the influential work of Labov and Waletzky (1967), scholars have profusely drawn on narrative to examine how subjects conceive and frame their own experience of the world, and how they manage this cognitive patterning in linguistic interaction. Tellers draw from culturally shared repertoires of plots to signal the social point of an anecdote. Of special interest has been the rôle of narratives in accounting for the narrator's and others' actions as a social matter. Drew (1998, 295) points out this moral character by highlighting that narratives always “display an action's (im)propriety,

(in)correctness, (un)suitability, (in)appropriateness, (in)justices, (dis)honesty, and so forth". Thus, drawing on theories and methods from ethnography and anthropology, narrative research has focused on how the inescapably situated task of narrating works to bring a social self into existence (Bamberg, 2005). Subsequent developments have increasingly focused on how this work appears not only in conventional narrative forms, where structure and evolution are neatly marked, but also in the minimal stories crafted to fit the communicative requirements of the conversational here-and-now Bamberg (2004); Georgakopoulou (2006a).

Interest on narrative forms has been significant in management research. Some scholars have focused on the uses of narrative as part of organisational activity, e.g., in socialising workers into the local dynamics or in making sense of past events (Boje, 1991). Other have been bolder, considering storytelling to be the central part of managerial work in and of itself. Czarniawska (1999), for example, argues that managing is basically a sense-making enterprise, and that it is accomplished by crafting stories that engage the various organisational members. A similar outlook is applied to the field of organisational studies itself (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1995). These trends, however, have drawn only rarely from contemporary discourse analysis. Much of their theoretical orientation is to be found in traditional narratology and in post-structuralist philosophical theories, and the range of tools they bring to the analysis of narratives often falls short of an actual engagement with its linguistic and interactional structure. Thus, the focus on the overall themes of the narrative obscures the subtle positioning work that establishes situated rôles for author and audience.

In this chapter, we analyse narratives employed in popular management texts as interactive devices, where storytelling is deployed to fit the pragmatic context of justification in which the author is engaged. Authors of books on management advice do not only have to cogently present an explanation of facts, but also plausibly represent it in a vocabulary and format that addresses the expectations of readers. Part of these expectations involve the social identity of the writer. To

authoritatively comment on organisational matters, their credentials as expert members of the insider community have to be continuously redeployed in their semiotic performance. We show how narratives are articulated with several other dimensions of the discursive design in order to convey such a personality and bring to fruition the pedagogic intent of the text.

## 4.1 Understanding everyday narratives

Narratives have attracted wide interest since Antiquity, but defining what does exactly define a story has been a singularly difficult task. Several features seem intimately bound to the nature and function of narrative, but no single one has attracted scholarly consensus. In seeking a minimal definition of the narrative character, Toolan (1988, 7) argues that a global structuring principle and an episodic character are fundamental, and offers a summary definition as “a perceived sequence of non-randomly connected events”. Against this structural view, Todorov’s (1986, 328) equally succinct formulation favours instead the presence of tension and its eventual resolution: “the shift from one equilibrium to another (...), separated by a period of imbalance”. This second definition hints at the primacy of functional considerations, focusing on the reasons that make the event worthy of telling. Other staples of traditional definitions have been the beginning-middle-end structure; the presence of a narrator, an (imagined) audience, and identifiable characters; and conflict or violation of conventional expectations. None of them, however, seems to accurately account for the wide range of texts and text fragments that fall under the intuitive notion of narrative.

### 4.1.1 Narratives large and small

Literarily-minded narratology and early approaches to vernacular storytelling have largely limited themselves to texts possessed of most of these prototypical characteristics, often called “well-formed narratives”. This has allowed much

of this work to assume that narratives are a neatly distinguishable genre or text type.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, recent work focusing on narrative as talk-in-interaction, embedded in social practices from which it derives its nature and function (Georgakopoulou, 2007, 9), has been more open to acknowledge the fuzziness of the category. In this view, fully developed narratives are just an extreme case in a complex family of text fragments, occupying a range of positions along clines of tellability, completeness, linearity and other dimensions (Ochs and Capps, 2001).

When narration is thus understood a textual device, it recruits texts from far beyond the realm traditionally attended to by literary theory (Virtanen and Warvik, 1987). From a related point of view, Swales (1990) considers it a trans-generic building block out of which genres many may be developed. And even though Hardy's (1968, 5) claim that "[we] dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative" is characteristically hyperbolic, there is little doubt that stories are deployed in a wide range of functions possibly unmatched by any other discursive modality.

Previous studies have suggested the existence of an intimate link between narrative discourse and the structure of experience and self-perception (Branihan, 1992). Bruner (1991) has famously defined it as one of the two fundamental modes of human thought, where the specifically personal aspects of agency, feeling and goal-directedness are brought to the fore. Narratives are suffused with "an active effort after meaning" (Bartlett, 1932). In other words, they ostensibly concern themselves with fact, but quietly seek to impose a schema and a structure to the recollection of events that derives from the cognitive quest to decipher the *facta bruta* of experience (McGuire, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1988). As Wertsch (2002, 57) points out "a crucial fact about narratives as cultural tools is that they make it possible to carry out the 'configurational act' required to 'grasp together' sets of temporally distributed events into interpretable wholes or plots".

If narrative is conceived as an ongoing effort of meaning-making carried out throughout our everyday performances, then the traditional claim that narratives deal with extraordinary events to highlight, in comparison, the expected order of things (McGuire, 1990, 231) seems inadequate. Singularity and uniqueness are hardly the stuff of unelicited stories told in routine contexts (Barcinski, 2004). Extraordinary events remain prominent in the prototypical “big stories” used to build coherent accounts of personal identity (Linde, 1993, 107), but in seeking to understand the management of the self in everyday interaction it is rather more fruitful to emphasise the commonplace blocks used to build the multiple positions occupied in our daily practices (Freeman, 2003; Rattansi and Phoenix, 2005). Georgakopoulou (2006a) suggests that small, everyday stories may not seem tellable in an abstract sense, but they nevertheless seamlessly fit the pragmatic requirements of their local contexts.

#### **4.1.2 Narratives and persuasion**

The specific contribution of stories to persuasive discourse can take many different forms. Stories embedded in argumentative structures, for example, can play the rôle of supporting evidence for generalisations, even if the general claim has not been historically derived from these specific experiences but is instead a part of ideological shared knowledge (van Dijk, 1993c, 126). They take advantage of their ostensible facticity to add weight to their claims, apparently bypassing the need for interpretation or inference (DiPardo, 1990; Journet, 1995). The influential linguistic category model (LCM) of Semin and Fiedler (1989) argues that descriptions of concrete events are taken as “objective” information, less disputable and easier to verify than higher level claims.

In Chapter 5 we deal with this empirical, epistemic use of narratives. For the present analysis, however, we want to focus on a field that has been particularly active within research on “the about, the what and the who of narrative” (Georgakopoulou, 2006b, 125): the study of narratives for constructing and presenting the self, playing it out against the backdrop of culturally shared norms

and schemas for behaviour (Chafe, 1990). Narratives —especially those dealing with personal experience— make transparently clear a person’s mental model of their own being and history. Bruner (1987, 15) argues that the fleeting material of life events and experiences is constantly rebuilt by these narratives of the self, and that we are defined not by an objective life-path, but by the account we are able to provide of it.

The construction of this persona in narrative involves two distinct dimensions. Specific to the narrative discourse mode is the direct encoding of the narrator’s sense of their own identity through the narrated contents of personal experience (Fludernik, 2000, 281): what the story is about —the *fabula*— and what does that say about the character of its protagonists. Labov and Waletzky (1967) foregrounded in their classic work on narrative structure the author’s “self-aggrandisement”, that is, their management of impressions to portray themselves in the most favourable light. This positive self-presentation (see also Oliveira, 1999; van Dijk, 1998) matches the rôles of *hero* and *villain* proposed by Propp (1928) to understand folk narratives.

No less important is why the story is told in a certain way —how the *fabula* is shaped into a given *sjuzhet*. These structural features do not index identity directly, but rather convey the author’s ability to provide what Chafe (1990) terms *verbalization*, the ability to semiotically frame the raw material of experience into a symbolic performance that efficiently draws on cultural expectations about topics, scripts, settings and meanings to compellingly put forward its point.

This is not to say that there is a linear, univocal correlation between features of language use or discourse organisation and individual identity, but rather that discursive interaction is strategically designed to negotiate aspects of identity relevant to the local context of action (Silverstein, 1976). In literary narrative, for example, the high level of sophistication in narrative form and the detachment allowed by fictional subjects rarefy the actual textual incarnation of the author to the point of undecidability. In settings with other transactional ob-



jectives, authors are conversely expected to make certain features of the self available through semiotic coding. Writers may foreground their individual, “unique”, persona (Johnstone, 1996), or choose to ostensibly draw on one or more of their group memberships —identifying themselves as part of an ethnic, social or gender group (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1992; Myers, 1989). In other cases, they may rely on institutional membership, choosing to background their personally defining traits and assimilate themselves to the well-structured and professionally or organizationally sanctioned forms of discourse, thus voicing their own words as the established authority of the discipline or institution (Alred and Thelen, 1993).

### 4.1.3 Situatedness

It is important to note that there is no intrinsic divide between personal and professional or institutional identities. The range of features that bind the local interaction with broader goals and activities cover both aspects of the persona in a dialectical relation (Fairclough, 2001). Whether a specific aspect of narrative construction indexes purely personal characteristics for socialising purposes, or else depicts professional traits with relevant transactional objectives cannot be assessed in isolation from the specific context of interaction.

Understanding narratives as a source of information entails situating interpretation in this contextual frame. All narratives—even those highly stylised by the circumstances of their institutional mediation, such as clinical reports (Hunter, 1991, 85)—are rhetorically and strategically designed to perform a discursive action. What manner of action this may be, and how it will be judged, is a function both of the interactional objectives that narrators seek to accomplish, and of the nature of the setting in which the interaction takes place and the cognitive and social expectations associated with it.

In the end, it is far more useful to investigate the specific forms narrative takes in different discursive and disciplinary settings than to attempt to provide a single model for narrative as a mode of expression. The resources each speaker

may employ in communication owe less to some inherent properties of discursive form than to the standards for rhetorical and interpersonal strategy set by his knowledge of prior texts and his expectations of his interlocutors' exposure to similar situations (Doheny-Farina, 1991, 295). Although communication always involves innovation and creativity, the patterns of disciplinary or institutional routine stabilise the enormous variety within the linguistic system into choices suited both to the specific context of practice and the associated professional ideology (van Dijk, 1997b, 27). In some circumstances and groups, narratives may be an expected way to express a stance and forward a cognitive claim, while they may be equally inadequate in a different context.

Tellability (Labov, 1972, 366; see also Labov, 1997) —that is, the pragmatic “point” of the story that may hold the listeners' attention and ensure their interest in the prolonged monologue that the speaker has bid for— cannot be therefore understood outside a context model (van Dijk, 2006b) describing the goals and participants of communication. Labov noted that the attention commanded by stories finds no parallel in other discourse types, what may account for their great interpersonal and textual efficacy (396), but that tapping on this potential required constant, complex evaluative and orientating work on the part of the teller.

Adequacy does not simply limit what may be told, but also who may tell, how and to whom (Toolan, 1988, 6), making this an important *locus* of exercise of discursive power. Narratives often involve extended speech turns, the concession or competition for which may be strongly regulated. This is true of small stories as well, as autonomy in discursive interaction involves not only animation (Goffman, 1979), but also the complex web of authorial decisions —embedded in interactional challenges and metacommunicative comments— through which the participants jointly establish the nature of what is told.

More highly situated speakers are less likely to be limited in their choice of expression, and may choose to risk boring their listeners or be otherwise long-winded without fear of direct negative repercussions for the efficiency of

their communicative practice. For those not so privileged, the use of narrative to convey meaning instead of more concise, explicit types of discourse is likely to be frowned upon where transactional goals are directly prevalent and the speaker to be considered verbose or worse. Wagner and Wodak (2006, 389) point out the importance of noting the constraints that make many narratives effectively invisible.

#### **4.1.4 Narratives and the making of situated knowledge**

Mink (1960) foreshadowed much of the narrative turn in contemporary psychology and humanities suggesting that stories uniquely motivate the interest and comprehension of listeners by presenting events in a reconstruction of experience as lived (see also Hyvärinen, 2006; Rimmon-Kenan, 2006, for critical perspectives). Narratives are usually perceived as more vivid and entertaining than other forms of expression, thus showing greater consideration for the feelings and expectations of the audience (Maranhão, 1984). At the same time, however, narratives are less obviously pointed than abstract general assertions. Telling stories remains focused on the concrete details of everyday action, a valued trait in contexts where the epistemic structure of the community favours a grass-roots rather than a straight-from-the-book attitude.

On the other hand, while anecdotes and personal observations are routinely employed to provide evidence, relief from exacting theoretical development or a human face to an otherwise arid subject, academic and scientific discourse sharply demarcate them from the disciplinarily-established body of knowledge. Scientific writing is designed to expurgate all traces of personal experience from the official description of knowledge formation, let alone rely on it as a source of authority (Gilbert and Mulkey, 1984). Thus, the choice of narrative entails a certain subject position (Schiffrin, 1996, 169) that bases the process of meaning-making on individual experience, foregrounding its “experiential” nature (Fludernik, 2000, 285). Contexts of practice that admit the narrative transformation of personal experience into shared, interpersonal beliefs are built on cultural

rules and expectations that markedly deviate from hegemonic academic models.

Then again, and as we noted above, the social and the personal are inextricably enmeshed in most forms of discourse, and classificatory attempts seeking to project a clear-cut division often fail to do justice to actual practices. Analysing workplace talk, Drew and Heritage (1992) sought to ascribe these different functions to positions along a transactional-social axis, where narratives would go from the precise and professionally useful report of facts to the more vivid, interpersonally valuable narratives used for socialisation. Marra and Holmes (2004, 62–4) took up this notion to distinguish *reports* of past events from *anecdotes*. However, Holmes (2005, 677) would later redefine the distinction to acknowledge the existence of *working stories*, narratives that approach the fully Labovian design of anecdotes while retaining a distinctive relation to business goals. In a pointed example of this polyvalence, Witten (1993) had discussed how anecdotes are used to maintain social order within an organisation, warning novices of the undesirable outcome of violating limits.

More broadly, a good deal of professionally- and institutionally-relevant talk appears in the guise of simple socialising. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003, 96–7) remark that professional ties are often developed in private talk, and that lack of access to some seemingly personal settings may deprive a person of crucial professional information. Conversely, adopting a given rôle is intimately tied with the ability to project or index an image of the self that is compatible with the prototypical requirements for its fulfilment. Even when institutional arrangements grant an actor legitimacy or authority, the performance of an appropriate identity is often required to legitimate this ascription.

## 4.2 An analysis of narratives

Understanding the rôle of stories in popular management writing requires thus an approach orthogonal to the personal-professional axis. Whether stories are

told to make meaning about the world or about the tellers themselves, they can serve both socialising and instrumental goals. While no taxonomy can be more than an approximation of ideal types, never fully apprehending the particulars of a given utterance, a model helps shed light and order on the many disparate realisations of narrative communication.

### **4.2.1 Classifying narratives**

To devise an accurate model, we searched in our corpus for all instances of narration, deliberately ignoring the functional constraints suggested by the Labovian tradition to allow for the complete range of uses of narrative mode. The findings ranged from complex, sophisticated stories covering thousands of words and entire chapters, to extremely brief single-event narratives used as illustrative examples. Examining the excerpts according to their ostensible discursive function, we identified a number of relevant dimensions.

#### **4.2.1.1 Informing and interpreting**

Possibly the most straightforward function of narratives is to help make sense of events. Stories are linguistic representations of events in memory that preserve a very significant amount of episodic detail (van Dijk, 1993c, 124), much more than will eventually reach semantic status. This provides not only the opportunity for much embellishment, but also for a multiplicity of interpretations. Stories thus allow for events that have not been completely understood to appear in a presentable form— or to present events in a form that will require readers to exert a significant and unpredictable amount of cognitive processing of their own to understand the general scripts and schemata animating it. While a completely random sequence would be extremely taxing to memorise or comprehend, the richness of detail allows authors and readers to project many consecutive or concurrent interpretations on data.

The inner dynamics of narratives lead to a further distinction within this typology. When narratives follow a global evaluation —a generalisation, of-

ten universal in nature, that seeks to pointedly summarise its content— we have *illustrations*. These provide exemplary applications of general, rule-based knowledge to concrete events, bridging the gap between disembodied, “formal” knowledge and the listeners’ experience.

Conversely, *examples* seek to maximise their cognitive impact by not presenting a conclusion beforehand. Rather, they develop a more or less tentative model for an as yet undefined rule in the narrative itself. They use the temporal progression of narratives to iconically replicate the feelings of uncertainty and development integral to actual experience. Of course, much discursive control underlies these feelings, thanks to the narrative structure moulding the *fabula* into a specific *sjužet*, but nevertheless this design yields a conspicuous feeling of evidentiality that positions the reader close to the projected experience of the teller. We discuss both of these narrative types in the following chapter, where this process of interpretation is explored at large.

Also within this category we find *reports*: relevant, informative, context-bound stories largely devoid of complication or entertainment value, and not embedded in an argumentative structure. Their contents may be important as background information for processing of other material. Narratives of this kind are usually brief, unobtrusive, and often appear in descriptive sections and within other narratives.

#### 4.2.1.2 Narratives of the self

Secondly, we find narratives intended to make sense of the author themselves. Stories go beyond the specific events recounted to make meaning with the many disparate fragments of lived experience. They inscribe the teller within a coherent path, marking the emergence of an identity (Hinchman and Hinchman, 1997)— even if only for a while and with no aspirations to an encompassing account (Georgakopoulou, 2006b). Professionals in everyday interaction and academics in lectures, for example, extensively employ narratives to display their competence. Personal experience and critical commentary of others are

deployed in anecdotes, construing a professional character that suffuses their everyday life and grants legitimacy to their authorial activity.

Especially important among these are *epistemic narratives* (Todorov, 1971), which provide an account of the process of knowledge creation and acquisition. These narratives recreate knowing in terms of a plotted journey from ignorance to wisdom, and while they seldom make any claims as to the overall nature of knowledge or the practical boundaries of a discipline, they anchor the conceptual substance of thought to model paths. The processes of problem formulation, technological and theoretical development, and their eventual resolution are made coherent from the point of view of a specific actor. Unlike the “narratives of science” that Myers (1990) describes, where experiments and theories are detached from the actual researchers to become autonomous authors, these epistemic narratives integrate storytelling and conceptual knowledge in encounters where the singular and remarkable is the main focus of observation. The reader is framed as a fellow traveller in the quest for knowledge (cfr. Lightman, 2000).

Such an epistemic narrative is apparent at the beginning of Christensen’s *Innovator’s Dilemma*, which argues for the validity of the author’s view in terms of a journey that the readers are invited to follow:

- (1) When I began my search for an answer to the puzzle of why the best firms can fail, a friend offered some sage advice. [...]

Some of that detail is recounted here and elsewhere in this book, in the hope that readers who are immersed in the detail of their own industries will be better able to recognise how similar patterns have affected their own fortunes and those of their competitors.

#### **4.2.1.3 Narratives of textual organisation**

Finally, narratives may be intended to modulate the discursive superstructure, establishing information patterns, marking frame boundaries or activating

scripts relevant to subsequent communication. The thematic development of narratives may be overlain on the argumentative structure of the text, providing a global scaffolding for discursive development, or minimal narratives can be deployed at the boundaries of larger-scale units, such as chapter or sections, providing an efficient device to lay out the cognitive bases for the same.

Thus, many narratives appear in initial position at the beginning of sections or chapters. Conspicuously introducing a new subject, setting or process, they signal these changes and prepare the terrain for subsequent discourse by eloquently displaying some key aspect or a relevant personal anecdote. The shifting of information patterns is made visible, and topically relevant scripts or frames are activated in an agile manner. *Incipits*, as they may be called, resemble digressions to some extent, as no previous orientation links them to the ongoing flow of discourse. However, they fulfil a global goal, as the ensuing tension enlivens the communicative situation, and the cognitive need for a resolution to close the ongoing dissonance pushes the reader forward. There is no little promotional intent in this. It has often been remarked that shifts in consumption patterns and epistemic habits have led many genres to resemble advertisement in their unabashed self-aggrandisement (Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1994; Fairclough, 1995). The following excerpt from *The Leadership Engine* illustrates how an author uses the narrative to break the ice and establish the problem-solution pattern that will guide the author through the text:

- (2) In August 1991, Bill Weiss, the CEO of Ameritech, walked into my office with a problem. The company he headed was an old-style Baby Bell telephone company that suddenly found itself having to compete in a new, fast-moving telecommunications industry. [...] Within six months of this meeting, two of the key potential CEO successors had left Ameritech, and four new potential successors from within the organization were leading a massive cultural change effort called Breakthrough Leadership. [...] By May 1994, when Weiss retired, the company had



been totally reorganized into new business units, and a new CEO was in place: 47-year-old Dick Notebaert. It had thousands of reenergized and motivated employees. And it was primed to take off in the new telecommunications world.

#### **4.2.2 A multifunctional story**

The many functions described above are routinely intermingled in actual practice. In this section, we explore how several narrative resources are used in the construction of an expert rôle, including self- and other-evaluation, interpretive judgements, and the selection of represented actors. We then investigate how these strategies are balanced by a relative downplaying of the authorial expertise, presenting experts as persons that can be empathised with, while at the same time never challenging the interpretive ability of their epistemic self. Finally, we show that voice and focalisation shifts serve to establish authorial control over the narrative's interpretation while ostensibly distancing his empiric persona from it, thus reinforcing his authority with the detachment of impersonal knowledge.

The story discussed here constitutes the introduction to Thomas L. Friedman's 1999 best-seller *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, a pro-globalisation manifesto that discusses the new international system as the independent variable influencing the politics, environment and economics of all countries in the world. Friedman is a well-known journalist, three times recipient of the Pulitzer Prize, a regular op-ed columnist in *The New York Times* and an ardent supporter of free trade. In this story, he draws on his personal acquaintance with highly-situated economic and politic actors to provide an insider look at the contemporary status quo. Friedman's claim that "if you can't see the world, and you can't see the interactions that are shaping the world, you surely cannot strategize about the world" is supported by the narration of the privileged settings he has access to, and multiply reinforced by various narrative strategies. He narrates three economic crashes: the 1997 collapse of the Thai baht, which seriously affected the

highly dynamic South Asian economies for a period of years; the ensuing default on Russian government bonds; and the 1999 devaluation of the Brazilian real. The connection between these stories is depicted through a variety of actors—governments, international institutions, companies and Friedman himself.

In this excerpt —reproduced as Appendix A— Friedman displays his credentials as a legitimate authority on globalisation by various means. He presents himself as a first-person witness and even an important actor in the key events he recounts; his professional abilities have him taking part in very highly-prized contexts, place him next to successful, visionary entrepreneurs, and yield concrete results in the most unequivocal manner known in his medium: monetary profit. But that is only half of the picture. While his mildly humorous recount of his own actions brings him back to human scale by highlighting his surprise and not always successful choices, in the artfully developed orientation and evaluation his epistemic voice places him clearly above all other participants. While the others in his narrative stumble and fall by their own lack of foresight, the author presents his own learned, sophisticated interpretation of the complex causality of financial events in a globalised economy even before the events come to fruition in the narrative. His epistemic rôle is that of the highly-informed and subtle expert carefully assessing a complex event, something no-one else in his narrative is capable of doing.

#### 4.2.2.1 Success and professional expertise

One of the most singular features of these data is precisely the appeal to personal involvement in an analytic study of a scientific phenomenon, namely increased economic integration. Although the context in which this narrative is presented is far from a scientific one, the importance of the author's figure as a character departs more significantly from the detachment that is supposed to permeate knowledge-making than would be expected. The author-as-character plays a different rôle from the author-as-commentator that we analyse *infra*, but his authority and power are portrayed in a highly conspicuous fashion. The activi-

ties he is depicted in entail the real-life application of the knowledge and skills the book is designed to transmit. Their depiction of ability goes beyond the academic field, showing its practical applicability and displaying monetary result. Analytic expertise is conversely reserved for non-narrative clauses, where the epistemic voice will provide a complete framework for understanding the disjoint events.

- (3) Many businesses couldn't pay the finance houses back, many finance  
houses couldn't repay their foreign lenders and the whole system went  
into gridlock, putting 20,000 white-collar employees out of work. The  
next day, I happened to be driving to an appointment in Bangkok down  
Asoke Street, Thailand's equivalent of Wall Street, where most of the  
bankrupt finance houses were located. As we slowly passed each one of  
these fallen firms, my cabdriver pointed them out, pronouncing at each  
one: "Dead! . . . dead! . . . dead! . . . dead! . . . dead!"

Excerpt (3) strategically presents the author as a savvy and well-connected player in world finance, showing him to be personally involved in business at the heart of Thailand's financial district. While other participants in the narrative, the large majority of the country's financial institutions, had failed at their job with catastrophic consequences, Friedman appears still doing business. Its exact nature is not described, but the setting hints at high-level financial matters.

Interaction with the other is not displayed in this passage, except inasmuch as it is entailed by the author's taxi ride. The subtly progressing lexis for other-description ("bankrupt", "fallen", "dead") reinforces the contrast between the very much active and successful Friedman and the negative portrait of the other players in the financial arena, simultaneously highlighting his unusual skill and the risky nature of the activities he undertakes.

A contrasting feeling of normalcy is ostensibly evoked by the sentence performing the shift between other- and self-description, as Friedman prefaces his own actions with the rather ordinary turn "I happened to be driving". While

the preceding lines momentarily describe the turmoil of the Thai financial scene at the time, the attitude enacted by this strategic choice is sharply different. The extraordinary, critical events taking place—which constitute its surface point or *tellability*—contrasts with the speaker’s nonchalant involvement with his daily doings. His impassive demeanour helps construct both an efficient, businesslike attitude and present him as an experienced, almost blasé man of the world.

Thus, Friedman presents himself in a superior rôle: as the expert whose skill in business allows him to remain in activity even when market-wide catastrophes have taken most of the players out of the field, and as a dispassionate observer to whom even such events do not seem a matter for anxiety or concern.

Further on in the chapter, another case of involvement is again presented. In this case, dramatic tension is maintained by an apparent challenge to the author’s ability, yet he is proved in the end the most skilled strategist.

- (4) Now we get to my street. In early August 1998, I happened to invest in 1  
my friend’s new Internet bank. The shares opened at \$14.50 a share and 2  
soared to \$27. I felt like a genius. But then Russia defaulted and set 3  
all these dominoes in motion, and my friend’s stock went to \$8. Why? 4  
Because his bank held a lot of home mortgages, and with the fall of in- 5  
terest rates in America, triggered by the rush to buy T-bills, the markets 6  
feared that a lot of people would suddenly payoff their home mortgages 7  
early. If a lot of people paid off their home mortgages early, my friend’s 8  
bank might not have the income stream that it was counting on to pay 9  
depositors. The markets were actually wrong about my friend’s bank, 10  
and its stock bounced back nicely. Indeed, by early 1999 I was feeling 11  
like a genius again, as the Amazon.com Internet craze set in and drove 12  
my friend’s Internet bank stock sky high, as well as other technology 13  
shares. 14

The complex world of international finance is the subject of the entire chapter, which recounts the tribulations of investors and financial entities in the seemingly unconnected Far East, Eastern Europe, Latin America and the United States. By the onset of this excerpt, the previous 1500 words had successively described the Thai crash already seen in Excerpt (3), the ensuing débâcle in other Asian markets, the collapse of the Russian commodity economy, deprived of its main customers, the inability or unwillingness of the IMF to control the situation, and the globally-spreading chaos caused by severe losses incurred in by investment institutions from the West. None of the actors depicted in the elaborate, multi-stage recount had managed to act in its best interest; among those who had misjudged the course of events were the IMF, several governments, and even the Nobel Prize-winning economists behind the strategy of the world's largest hedge fund. The narrative carefully describes the disastrous results of their actions and the tremendous losses incurred by both private and public investors.

The first —and only— mention of planned financial success appearing is Friedman's decision to invest in a friend's shares, as described in Excerpt (4). While the failure of other actors to accurately choose their investment path permeates the narrative and is one of its core macrostructural elements —the vertiginous instability of the global market—, Friedman depicts himself not simply as sagely interpreting the complex chains of cause and effect that carry the trouble throughout the globe, but also taking advantage of the situation to obtain personal profit. He does not only understand the global picture, something everyone else seems incapable of doing, but also effectively acts on his expertise to verify his predictions in the most irrefutable way known to business: monetary gain. In contrast to the “markets” —an impersonal force where all other actors are conflated—, Friedman is right in his choices. While he mildly mocks himself playfully stating to have “felt like a genius” (entailing that, after all, he does not think himself one), it is facts, not thoughts that back up his credibility as an expert.

Both the above excerpts provide warrants for the writer's authority, deriving it from his real-world position as recounted in the narrative. In the first one, his ability is demonstrated by remaining in business, while all other actors are depicted as failing; in Excerpt (4), by his managing to obtain financial gain in an agitated market, again being the only one mentioned who succeeds in this goal. Both descriptions highlight the positive results that may be obtained through judicious application of the knowledge he possesses, and draw a boundary not only separating him from the uninitiated, but also from other institutionally recognised players in the financial field; in the highly competitive and weakly institutionalised market of managerial knowledge, such a distinction is doubtlessly important, and is conspicuously realised throughout the text.

It is evident from these excerpts that authors do not simply rely on institutional arrangements or professional prestige to assert their authority in pedagogical action. An orientation to the construction of a successful, highly esteemed persona is visible throughout the text, and shows that the value of their knowledge has to be continuously established during communicative interaction. This goal makes manifest the intimate bound between transactional and social goals in persuasive communication. To be able to effectively communicate in knowledge-making activities, the writer's identity as a trusted source must be established. However, except in the most formal and arid of reports, the projected persona is much more complex. We now turn to a different aspect of the interpersonal construction, the development of an agreeable and interesting social character.

#### **4.2.2.2 Involvement and empathy**

Besides competent and skilful professionals, the strategic choices of the writers also seek to present them as human faces with which readers can empathise. To avoid the risk of disconnecting from their audience's experience or expectations, or coming across as overly proud or vain, they deploy a variety of lexical and discursive choices that side them with a man-on-the-street attitude rather than

a dispassionate academic outlook, and portray their frailties and oddities in a manner intended to be touching.

In our example, while the grammatical complexity obtaining from the written form is well above the standard for oral communication, it does not remain constant throughout the text. In a clearly observable pattern, stretches of highly formal grammar, with a high rate of passive voice clauses and nominalised nuclei, alternate with a more conversational and familiar register. The professional, didactic tone of the general exposition turns, for evaluation, to a more emotionally involved one. An example may be found in Excerpt (3), where the dramatic state of Thai finance is graphically assessed by the cabdriver's summary judgement. A similar one gives its finishing touch to the 30 line-long summary of the ensuing crisis in Russia, whose last paragraph is presented below:

- (5) As Russia's economy continued to slide in early 1998, the Russians had  
 to raise the interest rate on their ruble bonds from 20 to 50 to 70 percent  
 to keep attracting the foreigners. The hedge funds and foreign banks  
 kept buying them, figuring that even if the Russian government couldn't  
 pay them back, the IMF would step in, bailout Russia and the foreigners  
 would get their money back. Some hedge funds and foreign banks not  
 only continued to put their own money into Russia, but they went out  
 and borrowed even more money, at 5 percent, and then bought Russian  
 T-bills with it that paid 20 or 30 percent. As Grandma would say, "Such  
 a deal!" But as Grandma would also say, "If it sounds too good to be  
 true, it usually is!"

This sharply contrasts with the technically and grammatically complex register of the previous paragraphs, which employed nominalised and compact descriptions such as "fall in worldwide commodity prices", "negative value added" or "[dependence] on taxes from crude oil and other commodity exports to fund [the] operating budget". That was the language of science, where individual actions and events are projected onto a map of unchanging systematic rela-

tions (Halliday, 1998). But such an account is unlikely to entertain, or engage personal experience of the world, even when a rich smattering of textual and interpersonal metadiscourse attempts to make it more accessible to the uninitiated reader. To fully exploit its potential, the speaker moves on from the technical lexis towards a choice of language that projects a common-sense, down-to-Earth approach. The reference to “Grandma” is not simply intended as merry banter, but to evoke the culturally-encoded and highly universal experience of receiving simple but solid counsel from the elderly. It does not do power, but rather conjoins reader and writer in a shared recognition of how real life is.

This progression is periodically repeated in the text, marking the boundaries in the topical development. The voice shifts into a more familiar tone to provide colourful commentary as the text moves from the Thai crisis to the rest of the Asian markets, then to Russia, to globalised hedge funds and finally to Friedman’s American stock market betting. They are extraneous to the economical analysis, not adding much in the way of a conclusion to the detailed description of the process. Yet they are effective, clearly signalling the writer’s orientation to an audience interested in the potential real-life effects of his knowledge, and adding a collegial overtone to what may otherwise become a dry, uninvolved exposition. The multiple functions of embedded narratives make themselves clear at this point. While the overt point of the story is a pedagogical one, instructing the audience in the kind of events that characterise contemporary economy, it simultaneously asserts the writer’s qualifications to provide such guidance, and conveys an entertaining and amusing social image.

The shifting is multifunctional as well. By inserting a narrative framed in a different key—that of individual actors, as opposed to the abstract ones in the main story arc—it introduces a narrative pause, during which the pace of the action is momentarily halted (Toolan, 1988, 56). The coincidence with semantic macrostructural boundaries makes this device useful for controlling cognitive segmentation, helping the readers process each unit and clearly demarcating the events—even while maintaining the rather frantic narrative rhythm—in



a repetitive global pattern (Toolan, 1988, 62). While explicit interpersonal allusion is extraordinary —the only instance being the inclusive “we” used at the beginning of Excerpt (4)—, this accommodation displays a social orientation where the audience’s concerns are taken into account. While the author may want to appear as an expert, his concern with remaining close and responsive to his intended audience is also visible.

#### 4.2.2.3 Cognitive framing and focalisation

The shift in register discussed above is similar but not identical to more specifically narrative alternation of much interest. Friedman’s story is recounted in a constant see-sawing between two, rather distinct, modes of focalisation. The narrative anchoring of experience that enables the point of view of a text is one of the most penetratingly decisive features of narrative organisation (Toolan, 1988, 67–76), and variations in it are a highly sophisticated literary technique. By choosing to redefine the parameters determining the structure of the perceived world, the author provides the narration with a lively and elegant character, partially mirroring the complexity of direct experience.

While some crucial fragments are centred on the personal experience of the teller, the real-world person Thomas Friedman —and these fragments coincide with most of the humour and the self-downplaying—, a large part of the telling is carried out in a manner that could not be termed impersonal —since the author’s evaluations, quaint turns of phrase and colourful references are present throughout— but does definitely not appear to be centred on a specific individual’s experience of the events. Excerpt (5) is an example of this: even though the *voice* is quit distinctive and possesses a characteristic mode of expression, unlike the impersonal rhetoric associated with impartial reporting, the perspective adopted does not coincide with any single actor’s. In classical narratological terms, there does not seem to be an internal *focaliser* to the story. Focusing on the events from outside of the storyworld, as it were, large sections of the story appear to be told from no specific point of view, but rather as if from

above, in the omniscient, less than involved manner typical of external focalisers (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983).

Conspicuous focalisation, nevertheless, is not simply a device for framing the available information from the restricted position of a character in the storyworld. It is also a means to foreground the rôle that the focaliser's thoughts and reflections, the store of previous knowledge they bring to the interpretation, and last but not least their cultural and ideological orientation, play in the recounting. By downplaying focalisation, seemingly observing the events in a detached manner, the author deemphasises the fact that the story he is telling is not a simple relaying of a preexisting truth from natural observation (Gilbert, 1976, 285), but rather a highly interpretive construction arising from the complex interplay of technical knowledge, direct and indirect observation, and abductive hypotheses. As McGuire (1990, 226; emphasis ours) states,

narratives may be reports of actual events and real people, but they are not the things themselves. Historical narratives are inherently rhetorical: they do not present, but represent events and persons—they *interpret*.

There is no doubt that a great deal of knowledge is brought to this interpretation by a doubtlessly skilled professional. But the fact that this knowledge is not fully uncontested, and that many other interpretations of the original events might be produced by drawing on different bodies of learning is strongly backgrounded through a judicious shifting between modes of presentation in the narrative. More anecdotal events, and those where the constraints of congeniality and egalitarianism exert a more pronounced influence, are told in an homodiegetic manner, where the point of view of the “experiencing *I*” involved in the action events is the basis of the telling. Homodiegetic narrators are conventionally supposed to be subject to ordinary human limitations, including the ultimate unreliability of their assessments, based on inference and hypothesis (Lanser, 1981, 161). No matter how significant their degree of credibility, their

position may be challenged, and often is— by other characters or even by their own later, more knowledgeable, self.

In contrast, most of the story is presented in an *authorial* manner (Stanzel, 1979), offering a comprehensive exposition from a stance above and beyond all the people and things in the story— even Friedman-as-character's. His vocal quality is certainly retained, but the description of the events and actors goes well beyond what any concrete individual may reasonably be supposed to know; he possesses intimate knowledge of other actors' intentions and desires (such as in lines 6, 49 and 117), and describes in minute detail processes that cannot be observed in any way, but only fallibly inferred from fragmentary data, a process notably fraught with difficulties. Yet there is in the authorial voice no acknowledgement of this difficulty, nor any hint of a potentially different interpretation. The complex web of hedges with which scientists in all disciplines acknowledge the tentative character of their conclusions, even when their audience is unlikely to directly challenge them (Hyland, 2000, 124–5), is absent here. The voice of the author is not simply confident, but carries with it the assurance of absolute, "Olympian" (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983, 96), knowledge. Stanzel (1979, 195ss) notes that a typical pattern in this kind of authorial narrative is precisely the telling of an instructive, moralizing story about characters in a complex world, detached focalisation being ideally suited to it by grace of the elevated perspective that omniscience allows.

Interestingly, Genette (1972) describes focalisation as akin to grammatical mood, drawing attention to the fact that it serves to establish the source, and thus the "degree of affirmation", of every narrative statement. In his view, the functional rôle of focalisation is to constrict epistemic modality to a certain enunciator in the storyworld, allowing the speaker then to signal his own modal and attitudinal position in that respect through various means. The downplaying of focalisation thus may be said to indirectly serve to foreclose the establishment of a definite stance towards the interpretation offered in the text. It is presented as a *degré zéro* object, unmediated by subjectivity.

This dual development does not strictly coincide with the widely quoted distinction proposed by Greimas and Courtés (1976) between the landscapes of *action* and *consciousness*, as the key factor here lies not in the separate representations of Friedman-as-character's actions and his thoughts, but on the different stances adopted for the cognitive anchoring of the narrated events. The author skilfully employs variations in voice and focus to remain ostensibly at the centre of the events and render himself as the main character in the narrative, while this narrated self is not directly linked to the powerfully evaluative and interpretive framework raised to account for the events. It is informed by professional skill and knowledge, and depicted at highly valued activities, but remains human and fallible, even humorously so, as described in the following section. Nevertheless, the authorial self —depicted less through reported thought than through interpolated evaluation and general description of events— poses forward claims for a thorough comprehension unmatched by any character or force in the narrative. Out of this dual construction the narrative's author —who conflates both dimensions— emerges as a unique authority figure, both actual eyewitness and omniscient judge.<sup>2</sup> The narrative has no need to present him in action at the analytic activities that constitute the foundation for his authority rôle. Indirectly, and through careful control of the narrative structure, he manages to appear as sole possessor of valued knowledge and a skilful analyst. The avoidance of specific institutionally-based representation better serves to link this skill to his own authorial persona rather to an impersonal body of disciplinary knowledge, as might be the choice in the more tightly-bound fields of science.

Ochs and Capps (1996, 33) explicitly link this procedure for the construction of a monologic space of discourse to the exercise of power, viewing single-voiced narratives as a silencing device where the plurality of dissenting perspectives is muffled in order to socialise listeners into the prevailing ideology. By defining in a seemingly natural manner the frame of reference for a certain discourse, the potential counterpoint provided by alternate versions is aborted *in limine*,

forcing would-be dissenters to challenge not only the results, but also the opaque narrative framework employed to grant commonsensical status to a particular discourse. This is consistent with the strong bid for authority displayed by popular management writers, who formalise and offer models for the highly unstable and challenging world of business. As no disciplinary consensus may back the epistemic claims, their tentative status is downplayed by other means, especially the separation between individually-devised theory and generic common sense.

This strategy, as always, has its risks. While the complexity of narrative structure distances the apparent Friedman from the authoritative, imposing tone of the offered interpretation, he needs to remain close to it in order to benefit—as author—from the insights it offers. Academic writers and lecturers often defer to the impersonal authority of the discipline to avoid threatening their listeners' negative face directly (Hyland, 1998b). As this avenue is closed to authors in this genre, they must seek other means to alleviate their imposition. We now turn to one such strategy, the use of humour and self-criticism to highlight the human dimension of the authorial persona.

#### **4.2.2.4 Politeness and authority**

The interplay between professional and personal aspects of self is always complex and often contradictory. Even at the height of modern bureaucratisation, the clear-cut distinction desired for both was never as strong as some theorists (such as Weber, 1922) posited. Contemporary ideologies of the workplace have since greatly emphasised the degree in which private personality is supposed to suffuse working life— and, conversely, how deeply institutional affiliation is supposed to mould a person's outlook (Alonso, 2001; Boltanski and Chiappello, 1999).

This has entailed the development of a difficult position for expert knowledge. While scientific forms of knowledge wield a great amount of normative power in contemporary society and are routinely transformed into policy (Lemke, 1995), the actual wielders of expert power must balance this with the requirements of their personal identity. Unable to fully distinguish a professional persona from

their private one, they are trapped in an ideological double bind that requires them to simultaneously encode both aspects in their talk and text (Billig et al., 1988).

One form of appearing human and likeable is the conspicuous attention given to the audience's desire for entertainment discussed in section 4.2.2.2. By accommodating the preferences of the audience and ostensibly avoiding a flat tone, writers signal their care for their interlocutors and their respect for their negative face. There are several instances in which the author acknowledges this and employs humour to lighten the tone of the narrative. LTCM, one of the financial intermediaries that cause the collapse of the Russian economy in Excerpt (5) is defined as "the Mother of All Hedge Funds", with mocking capitals making fun of the institution's importance within the financial markets. The humorous definition of the Brazilian Amazon as "Amazon.country" also parodies the dot-com craze in full swing at the time of the book's publishing.

But, unless coupled with other face-saving strategies, this may give the impression of a patronising or condescending tone. To position themselves as their audience's equals is one of the possible courses authors may choose to avoid this. Holmes and Stubbe (2003, 585) discuss an example of this form of politeness through self-derision, in which the speaker mitigates her claims of efficiency and the plans she wishes to impose on a meeting by recounting her own activities in a slightly derisive manner. By foregrounding a clownish side to her actions, she defuses the tension inherent to her bid for authority, appearing as harmless and amusing.

Similar attempts at humour may be found in the text we have discussed. In Excerpt (4), the writer playfully asserts "I felt like a genius", implicitly acknowledging he may not, after all, be one. In fact, the humour in this exaggeration is highlighted when, only a few lines below, he informs us that the stocks he had invested in took another hit due to a financial crisis in Brazil. While the happy ending of the story confirms his ability as an analyst, this graphic depiction concedes that, after all, he may not be omniscient.<sup>3</sup>

A similar device is employed in the reference to “Grandma”, an unlikely authority figure in a discussion of this kind. But in this case there is more than self-deprecating at work to present the author in a favourable light. The choice of a familiar domestic form of advice directly presents the author as an ordinary, mundane person, and establishes a common ground with culturally stereotyped experiences of family life.

There are many instances of this form of presentation in this story. We have seen in Excerpt (3) that Friedman nonchalantly describes his actions in the turmoil of the Thai crisis as “happening to have a meeting”. While this “does power”, inasmuch as it portrays him as behaving in a stable and predictable manner even during a time of chaos, it also minimises the importance of his actions: the idiom chosen downplays his agency, and foregrounds the chance aspect of his being there. Although a witness of extraordinary events, the author is faced with them by sheer coincidence, in the course of performing a commonplace action. The device is well-known, and forms the basis for the now clichéd cultural template of the funny thing that just happened on the way to the forum. An identical template is applied to the purchase of stock mentioned in Excerpt (4), which Friedman just “happened” to do.

The work performed by these devices is complex. While they help build a congenial tone, presenting the author as a humorous and other-oriented narrator and highlighting the incongruity of his rôle —taking part in momentous actions, although only by chance—, an authoritative and prestigious undercurrent is present throughout. Friedman may use humour in his metadiscourse about LTCM, but he is nevertheless presenting a code gloss (Crismore et al., 1993), an item typically associated with strong pragmatic control of the reader’s interpretation of a text. He may employ a proverbial Grandmother as Principal for his assertion about the dangers involved in making business with a Russian government in critical condition, but the evaluative framework organising the text remains his. Moreover, the ordinary twist he gives to the description of his actions by prefacing them with “happened to” is ambivalent: just “happening”

to have an interview in an Eastern Tiger's equivalent of Wall Street, or buying stock in a friend's banking enterprise are certainly not "ordinary" for most people. The flaunting of the ordinary character they hold for him enhance his position as a powerful actor in elite business.

### 4.3 Discussion

In this chapter, we have analysed some examples of narratives in popular management writing, seeking to account for the many functions they fulfil. We have focused on two aspects of special importance for knowledge transmission: the rôle of narratives in portraying an expert identity, and the delicate narrative control that frames the text according to an interpretive schema that modulates the readers' comprehension. This has allowed us to explore the management of authority and the interplay of transactional and social goals in professional writing.

It is perhaps a signal of the unusual character of management knowledge, where academic researchers, professional practitioners and dedicated consultants interact in a unique pattern (Engwall et al., 2001, 30–35), that the mention of personal experience goes beyond the training anecdote or the entertaining digression to embed itself in the knowledge structure of the discipline. This seems to run counter to the structure of "softer" scientific fields, where authors take great pains to establish the relevance and nature of their topic in advance, due to the lack of an uncontroversial and univocally-defined set of problems (Becher, 2001). Writers in management, however, where "softness" is stretched to an extreme and a common disciplinary paradigm is utterly absent, tend to dispense with this orientation, and address their potential audience through such indirect means. Even though the books in our corpus are firmly on the popular side of the spectrum of management literature, they and like books are often used in academic teaching alongside more conventional manuals (Álvarez et al., 2000, 26–30).



It is likely —although impossible to determine without extensive research on reception and reaction employing expert informants— that this peculiarity reflects the epistemological and methodological beliefs of practitioners in management; not only the actual conditions of practice, that bind executives and consultants to a single environment for extended periods of time, making experimentally designed comparisons infeasible, but also an extended professional ideology inimical to systematisation and largely dependent on the case study (Sass, 1985, 203–4) foster an image of managerial practice where attention to concrete detail and induction from personal experience are paramount. The singularly frequent presence of authors themselves as protagonists —central or, less frequently, subsidiary— in their own narratives may also be accounted for in this manner.

In any case, it is beyond doubt that a recurrent technique in popular management literature involves the use of narrative to display authorial and professional skill, rendering it available to readers from widely different backgrounds. Writers should count on their work being circulated through at least four entirely different populations (Álvarez et al., 2000): academics and students in management and related disciplines, professionals in managerial positions —whether with or without formal management training—, entrepreneurs and professional colleagues in the teaching and consultancy business. Their display of competence has taken into account the variety in previous knowledge and disciplinary affiliations in such an audience. Some authors in our corpus drew frequently on stories of personal experience to display involvement and knowledge with the issues they addressed; they presented themselves in well-esteemed positions of power, and told the story of their own successful experiences to both make a point relevant to their pedagogical objective, and endorse their own identity as highly-skilled experts. Even more frequently, writers presented authoritative comment on both first- and second-hand stories, constructing their own personal through the artful use of evaluation and orientation as guiding devices for the interpretation of the narrated events. In their telling, they provide the log-

ical schemata needed to build a cognitive model of the story, while at the same time constructing other participants and potential or actual commentators as non-experts.

Research on persuasion in peer-oriented communities of practice, such as academic writing, has shown that a good deal of this persuasive effort involves tuning in with the expectations of the readership. In the present case, the inseparably transactional and social construction of a professional persona is oriented to showing personal involvement and participation in professional activities, most clearly defined by material profit. Moreover, the choice of development obscures the socially constructed of this frame: narratives, after all, always claim to tell the story “as it is”. To challenge this interpretation, readers must seek to undo not only the conclusion, but also the narrative framework that renders it seemingly inevitable.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>While there is a clear distinction between these two notions, it is not relevant to the issue at hand. For two engaging views of the distinction, see Fludernik (2000); Trosbor (1997).

<sup>2</sup>Mandelbaum (1993) suggests that eyewitnesses have a culturally privileged rôle, as their entitlement to the telling of a story is generally recognised; however, this is certainly subordinate to other authority factors that may be generally applicable, such as the reduced credibility of child narrators, or specific to a genre, such as the compulsory mediation of police authority in official reports (Ochs and Capps, 1996, 34). We see this subordination at work in that Friedman’s cabdriver may have been involved in the events, but is unlikely to be thought an accurate source for the story being told in this text. Beyond his doubtlessly relevant personal involvement, what informs and gives credence to the story is the thoroughly deployed analytic framework.

<sup>3</sup>On the other hand, the evaluative pattern discussed in the previous section

remains constant throughout; no matter how sympathetic we may find the misadventures of the character Thomas Friedman, the authorial paraphernalia is still in place, reminding us of his acknowledged expertise.

## Chapter 5

# Examples as persuasive argument

In this chapter, we explore the use of examples in popular management writing. The patterns of exemplification, illustration and exemplary injunction used by authors to give empirical grounding to their general theses, or make manifest the precise meaning of broader claims, are examined as a source of insight on the standards for proof and knowledge formation that operate in the diffusion and legitimation of management knowledge.

The study of examples has a long and complex story throughout a range of disciplines. However, much of it has been an unfavourable comparison with other, more abstract forms of reasoning and justification. Long regarded as a useful rhetorical tool with little cognitive value, it was only with contemporary developments on the theory of cognition that the key rôle examples may play in concept formation was recognised. But while empirical, quantitative work in communication has conclusively shown their great persuasive potential, little is known about its discursive deployment outside a few genres.

We argue that a nuanced analysis of the uses of exemplification and their place within the overall argumentative structure offers a prime opportunity for

exploring the constitution of disciplinary knowledge. What is actually exemplary in examples receives its specific character only through the selective framing of rhetorical and epistemological conventions. These establish relevance and locate the portrayed situations within a broader context of action, where the episodic narrative obtains its meaning.

However, no comprehensive theoretical model exists for the analysis of examples. We briefly present some basic considerations on the matter in order to investigate the complex uses they receive in popular management writing, a genre where their inordinate prevalence has been often remarked. Authors deploy examples as warrants for the techniques and strategies they propose, using them to influence readers' assumptions about the likelihood of success in preference to theoretical models or base-rate information. Their episodic nature makes them more amenable to understanding and remembering than abstract information. We seek to explain the choice of this strategy for textual development from the patterns of knowledge construction and transmission in management practice, where common assumptions about the world are used to evoke a disciplinary frame even in the absence of actual theory formation.

## **5.1 Exemplification in discourse and cognition**

Of the wide range of devices known to classical and contemporary rhetoric, few may claim such widespread use as examples. Their sheer prevalence in both everyday and formal speech seems to obscure the strategic rôle they play in most forms of expository or persuasive discourse. Examples seem not a rhetorical choice, but rather a natural fact of communication. Nevertheless, they possess great discursive and cognitive depth. Being episodic, and often narrative, they provide much richer detail than the general rules they are supposed to illustrate. As they always frame general claims in a specific light, with the concrete features of a particular instance, the message they convey is never entirely coincident with the premise that they support.

The cognitive effort involved in bridging this gap has been the occasion for many different analyses. While traditional theories of demonstration considered it a shortcoming in their logic validity (Aristotle, 1984), inferior to that of scientific proof, current research on knowledge accumulation and transmission has argued that it constitutes an essential element in higher cognition (Collins, 2001b; Kuhn, 1970). From this point of view, abstract categories can never be entirely detached from the concrete experiences, and all forms of thought retain traces of the specific exemplars upon which they are modelled. Strategies and patterns of exemplification thus go beyond a matter of rhetorical design to crucially impact on the interpretive process that gives rise to the meaning of a text.

### 5.1.1 Rhetorical theories of exemplification

Studies on the persuasive function of examples date back to the earliest traditions of rhetorical and logical analysis.

Aristotle (1984, 1356b) viewed arguments by example as the rhetorical analogue of inductive reasoning. However, as his theory of rhetoric was conceived as a further application of the general theory of demonstration, examples were viewed as falling short of the standards set for serious thought, and reasoning based on such basis was deemed fit for the kind of “persons who cannot take in at a glance a complicated argument, or follow a long chain of reasoning” (Aristotle, 1984, 1357a).

Cicero (1942, 205) held a similar opinion, valuing examples for their ornamental function and the warrant they provide for the *ethos* of the speaker, rather than for their contribution to cognition.

In Medieval religious literature, moral *exempla* —which offered models for imitation or rejection in narrative form— played a major rôle as persuasive devices in preaching (Brémond et al., 1982), although theorising on the matter was scant.

With the rise of rationalism by the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the progressive for-

malisation of scientific enquiry, examples seemed to be increasingly relegated to non-specialised or marginal forms of discourse (Lyons, 1989).

The view of examples advanced by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1958) expanded the traditional model in that it detached persuasive value from inferential validity. In their idiosyncratic taxonomy, arguments employing examples occupy an important place. They do not view them as echoing logical forms, but rather as “devices seeking to establish the structure of reality”, their term for arguments concerned with obtaining assent to a general conclusion about the world based on already-known or accepted premises. They distinguish argument by example proper, being the presentation of several regular cases to persuade of a general thesis, from illustration, where examples are used to add weight or import to generalisations already shared between rhetor and audience.

Finally, the sort of moral injunction used in Medieval *exempla* is assigned to a third kind, called argument by model, where a case is described in order to guide the future actions of the audience. The description of an excellent or exemplary instance does not ground its normative value in frequency, but rather on exceptional rigour or purity, hoping to lead the audience to imitation.

### 5.1.2 Prototypical exemplars in cognition

This duality in examples, which can be used to depict both an average tendency and an ideal prototype, surfaced also in cognitive studies, where the term *exemplar* has been customarily used to refer to specific instances entering into the cognitive process of forming a concept. The cognitive study of exemplars gained prominence with the research of Rosch (1973, 1975). In the face of the serious problems attached to the traditional theory of concept formation —such as the lack of clearly expressible definitions for everyday concepts, and the evidence for fuzzy boundaries in category membership—

research on cognition focused on how categorisation rules were derived from concrete instances. Two main types of theories were produced to explain this, both focusing on relations of similarity, but differing in the process that led to

their inference.

*Prototype* theories, such as that proposed by Rosch, viewed concepts as a central tendency abstracted from all known exemplars; entities are classified into a category when they are within the similarity threshold to its prototypical features.

As prototypes are dynamically elaborated from exposure to concrete exemplars, the specific items met in experience or argumentation become of paramount importance.

*Exemplar-based* theories of concepts are similar, holding that conceptualisation processes involve the comparison of perceived items with the whole stock of exemplars in memory. Particularly salient features are assigned a greater value in computing similitude.

### 5.1.3 Exemplarity in the mass media

Both exemplar- and prototype-based theories have been largely superseded in contemporary cognitive science, where most current research presents categorisation processes as arising from fully theoretical interpretations of the world based on background knowledge and complex modelling (Gopnik and Wellman, 1994; Murphy and Medin, 1985). Nevertheless, they helped raise interest in the cognitive function of examples in communication. As concrete exemplars were shown to enter into the formation of general knowledge, research focused on the cognitive import of examples provided in persuasive or informative discourse.<sup>1</sup>

Most of this research centres on how exemplification impacts on readers' estimations of the likelihood, desirability or importance of events, especially in journalistic texts where —according to Zillmann and Brosius (2000)— almost no print article fails to include examples.

Experimental measures indicate that readers' estimate of the frequency of certain events tends to be linked to how often they are depicted in a text, while explicit statistical descriptions tend to be disregarded (Zillmann et al., 1992, 52). Brosius and Bathelt (1994) found, in addition, that the stance expressed



in the examples also influences the readers' evaluation of the subject. Interestingly, subjects do not find a text biased or inconsistent even when the selection of examples contradicts the information expressed in statistical form. Strange and Leung (1999, 443) hold that the effect of examples on judgement does not proceed from explicit impression generalisation —that is, that they may effectively affect judgement or appreciation of causes without leading the subjects to consciously modify previous descriptive beliefs about the issue. This seems to explain why examples are compatible with contradictory base-rate information, and suggests that the schemata and models they elicit are not necessarily tested for coherence with other semantic information.

The range of topics, genres and subjects covered by these studies is limited,<sup>2</sup> but it seems reasonable to accept their claim that examples may be strongly persuasive even when not laid out as a specific form of argument. This has often been explained in terms of the theory of *heuristics* (Tversky and Kahneman, 1974), which argues that evaluations and predictions are seldom made using all potentially available information. Rather, strategies are employed that operate on a more limited range of data, trading accuracy for processing speed. Studies have suggested the existence of a *representativeness heuristic* —the process of judging an observed sample of data to be reliably indicative of the characteristics of an entire population despite considerations of size and sampling methods— and an *availability heuristic* —the disproportionate influence of easily retrievable information in the construction of the mental model. Thus, Brosius and Bathelt (1994, 51) hold that statistical data are discarded because of the effort of processing them accurately. Gibson and Zillmann (1994, 605) add that concrete examples are more salient and tend to attract more attention, thus earning a more central place in the information-building routines.

Also promising is the notion that the episodic structure of narratives provides a cognitive interface that is intrinsically more accessible than that of abstract information (Bruner, 2002). Brosius (1999, 215) asserts that, in the extensive literature available, no single variable can explain the persuasive power of ex-

amples besides structure itself: “it is obviously an inherent quality of exemplars that makes recipients’ judgements so strongly influenced by their distribution”.

#### 5.1.4 Discursive approaches to exemplification

Authors adopting *discursive* approaches to cognition have held that the above-described view of categorisation

is distorting, in that it detaches thought from the contexts of social action. They argue instead that cognition does not simply involve the abstract manipulation of data, but takes place within a life-world informed by patterns of social expectations, actions and goals. Rather than unilaterally determining discursive processes, categorisation is driven by the social and interactional goals of discursive action. Cognitive processes should be understood then in terms of the kind of discursive work they are intended for within specific contexts of interaction (Edwards, 1991).

This approach takes up some classic issues in cognition, such as ad-hoc categories —those created on-line for a specific need, like “things to take on a picnic” (Barsalou, 1983)— that have been often presented as a serious challenge to similarity-based models, but goes beyond them to argue that all cognitive and linguistic resources are shaped for the performance of situated social action. This entails that there is no clear difference between forms of categorisation deliberately and overtly presented by a speaker who argues that  $x$  is an instance of  $y$  —traditionally called *propositional* classifications— and the *semantic* grouping of classes of objects built into the grammar and lexicon of a discourse; in both cases, it is the social goals pursued by the speaker that lead them to select a form of expression, and its uptake by the interlocutors depends in turn on their own goals and purposes.

This model helps explain the inherent persuasive efficacy of exemplification. Examples are episodic representations of singular events, but their discursive deployment selectively cues features and traits for the formation of a meaningful mental model of what the text is about. This cognitive guidance implicitly

drives the generalisation process that leads to category construction. Despite their concrete nature, examples are thus always tied to the formulation of the general rules constituting semantic knowledge about the world. This view has much in common with that held by Lyons (1989, x), who argues that

[a]n example is a dependent statement qualifying a more general and independent statement by naming a member of the class established by the general statement. An example cannot exist without (a) a general statement and (b) an indication of this subordinate status.

This description, however, seems overly restrictive in its definition of examples. It seems in principle possible that the semantic rules being established through examples never be made fully explicit in the text, but rather cued only by the selective presentation of exemplary traits. In fact, descriptive theories of discourse structure —such as the Rhetorical Structure Theory of Mann and Thompson (1988)— have argued that most functional relations in text lack surface marks.

Our analysis begins from the premise that examples and categories are always constructed in a specific interaction, and that it is discursive goals and patterns rather than specific linguistic cues that reveal exemplification. Certain constraints are evident: to qualify as an example, a stretch of text must be more concrete and less general than the rule it is related to, but this still gives ample room for strategic deployment. Beyond this, there is little agreement on what are the defining traits of exemplification. Any episodic content may have an exemplary function given the appropriate contextual and co-textual cues. And examples themselves may serve a variety of rhetorical purposes, as the different functions ascribed to exemplification in the literature show.

Longacre (1983), for example, considers exemplification to be a case of illustration and thus an *elaborative* device, defined in essence by the addition of concrete information to an abstract formulation. Halliday and Hasan (1976) focus instead on its illocutionary potential for granting *evidence* to a claim. Knott

and Dale (1993) distinguish exemplification from the addition of information, arguing that one cannot substitute for the other without altering a text's meaning, but they do not address its pragmatic intent at all. Hobbs (1985), who does take this dimension into account, views exemplification as intended to ease the reader's difficulties of comprehension by providing peripheral information about the discourse referents. Mann and Thompson (1988) regard *elaboration* as the main purpose of examples, although the constraint they place on this relationship —that the satellite should only supplement the information in the nucleus, and never contextualise it— makes some examples appear to fulfil a *background* rôle as well.

Before exploring the different forms of example use in our corpus, we briefly present its specific nature, as well as the theoretical importance of examples to the study of management discourse.

### 5.1.5 The importance of examples in management writing

One of the remarkable traits that sociological studies of contemporary management literature have identified is its growing detachment from traditional scientific formulations. Just as the proposed ideals of organisational life have shifted from minutely programmed and hierarchically regulated activities

to a state of flux, where tasks, needs and skills must be constantly and creatively adjusted to match an ever-shifting market (see, for example Hammer and Champy, 1993; Kanter, 2001; Senge, 1990), the disciplinary ideal of management has partially abandoned the scientific models of rule-based, normalised evaluation and prediction for a pattern centred on creativity, innovation and emotional compromise (Alonso, 2002).

In an empirical study on the reading preferences of managers, Pagel and Westerfelhaus (2005) found that

—together with brevity, simplicity of language and directness— the presence of concrete examples is one of the features they value most in management texts. Texts without examples are rarely described as enjoyable or useful. While the

authors go to some length to analyse the rationale for this preference —mostly in terms of its fit with the pragmatic requirements of managerial practice— their analysis does not systematically take into account cognitive processes. However, subjects themselves seem to attach significant importance to this factor. A reported manager emphasised the point that examples are read for guidance as to the potential effects of the theories the text promotes and their applicability (439); another subject plainly stated that, in their view “[t]he theory is helpful at some point, but only if it is chased with an anecdote” (432).

Hackley (2003, 1342) notes that presentations of concepts and theories in marketing texts are profusely peppered with “case vignettes” describing products, companies or entrepreneurs. Although their textual placement makes it obvious that these exemplars are presented as warrants for the effectiveness of the associated technique, Hackley argues that the grounds for application are never fleshed out, making the association “spurious”. Chiefly of the same opinion are Alonso and Fernández Rodríguez (2006, 137, our translation), who assert that popular managerial writing relies on an “anthology of more or less arbitrary examples whose historical verisimilitude will always be open to doubt”.

In one of the very few available studies on popular management discourse from a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective, Chiapello and Fairclough (2002, 197–198; see also Fairclough, 2003b) discuss how the usage of brief, anecdotal examples helps Harvard Business School professor and management guru Rosabeth Moss Kanter (2001) manage a pervasive textual oscillation between description and prescription, shifting from epistemic sentences purportedly based on observation to deontic ones prescribing courses of action and identities. This serves to link both types of propositions in a *topos* often characterised as the TINA (“there-is-no-alternative”) principle (Fairclough, 2000b). In a distinctive manner, some of the declarative statements are predicated of an entity created in the text itself, “changemasters”. While this could be understood as the presentation of a theoretical model, the creation of this construct is never explicitly thematised. Rather, it is immediately juxtaposed with exemplary snippets that

work to provide it with the immediacy it would, as a concept, lack.

In the following section, we explore how such texturing is performed through the use of examples, allowing writers to put forward models and guidelines for professional practice without explicit thematisation. The samples we present are drawn from a corpus of over 100 best-selling management books, selected to provide a representative sample of managerial materials. The quoted excerpts illustrating it come from two texts, representing diverging strategies within a disciplinary community deeply divided by issues of method, theories and goals (Engwall, 1995b). In *Information Rules* (henceforward *IR*), by Shapiro and Varian (1998), authors make use of their own personal authority but openly draw from conventional forms of knowledge. Other authors openly disregard theoretical prediction and emphasise the impossibility to fully account for the context of managerial practice. We show this choice instantiated in *Unleashing the Killer App* (Downes and Mui, 1998) (henceforward *UTKA*).

## 5.2 An analysis of exemplification in popular management texts

As examples are defined by their function within the text rather than by any formal linguistic properties, identifying them may not always be a straightforward task. In some cases, the authors make their intent to exemplify explicit through metadiscursive (Hyland and Tse, 2004, 158) markers that explicitly organise the material and guide the reader in its interpretation. In others, the exemplary character has no surface markings, but rather depends on the readers' understanding of the textual structure.

### 5.2.1 Explicit examples

To indicate the introduction of an exemplary sequence, an explicit reference can be made to boundaries in discourse itself, labelling a segment in such a way as

to make clear its nature. This is the strategy used in the following excerpts from *IR*.<sup>3</sup>

- (1) [W]e think that content owners tend to be too conservative with respect to the management of their intellectual property. The history of the video industry is a good *example*.
- (2) Technologies subject to strong network effects tend to exhibit long lead times followed by explosive growth. [...] Fax machines *illustrate* nicely the common pattern.

In both these cases, the highlighted cue signals a relation between *textual structures*: a more or less extended description is shown to instance of a general proposition presented immediately before. The authors' claim of an exemplary nature for this description is explicitly stated.

Other forms of exemplification do not emphasise the sequencing of the text itself, but rather show a semantic relation of *similarity* or *analogy* between content elements. The following excerpts from *IR* do not make reference to the nature of the textual sequence, although metalinguistic cues about its elements are still explicit.

- (3) You may need to employ marketing tools *such as* penetration pricing to ignite the positive feedback.
- (4) Information businesses —*like* those in the print, music, and movie industries— have devised various strategies to get wary consumers to overcome their reluctance to purchase information before they know what they are getting.

While cognitive guidance in these devices remains overt, it is much less prominent than in the former kind. The signals employed are also characteristically more ambiguous; metadiscursive frame markers of the first kind (“for example”, “for instance”, “a case of”) are unlikely to be used for anything but indicating

exemplification, but the adjectives and conjunctions that form the bulk of the latter one may play many different rôles. Their exemplificative nature is thus backgrounded.

The matter of typicality is not here presented as the topic of talk, but rather as a parenthetical aside from the main point.

### 5.2.2 Implicit examples

The complexity of the processes involved in exemplification is even more evident when interpretive signals are ambiguous or absent. The following excerpt from *IR* illustrates this latter case, where the passage's rôle as an example can surface only through the reader's interpretation of the move structure:

- (5) Any idiot can establish a Web presence— and lots of them have. The big problem is letting people know about it. Amazon.com, the on-line bookstore, recently entered into a long-term, exclusive agreement with America Online (AOL) to gain access to AOL's 8.5 million customers. The cost of this deal is on the order of \$19 million, which can be understood as the cost of purchasing the attention of AOL subscribers.

While the last two sentences in this excerpt clearly serve as examples, no overt linguistic marking seems to signal this. Identifying them as such depends on understanding the passage in the context of the adjacent rhetorical moves. It is the specific interactive purpose to which the text is put that provides the necessary prompts for correctly understanding their function. This shows that the relation between examples and rules can remain implicit under certain conditions, as writers believe their readership capable of recovering it from the text without the need for formal prompts. Actually, as shown in Table 5.1, this is by no means an uncommon authorial strategy.

We can see the three kinds of examples as a cline of metadiscursive emphasis.



<b>Item</b>	<b>Quantity</b>
Explicitly marked examples	17 (13.93%)
Semantically marked examples	19 (15.57%)
Implicit examples	86 (70.50%)
<b>Total examples</b>	<b>122 (100%)</b>
Total words	6'265
Examples per 10'000 words	194.73

Table 5.1: Examples in the introductory chapter of *Information Rules*

Selection from this repertoire is doubtlessly bound to the degree to which the text responds to a textual pattern already known to the reader. When generic conventions are violated or unclear, authors cannot rely on previously shared knowledge in the context model to guide the meaning and intent of the text (van Dijk, 2006b), and must employ explicit rhetorical resources to embed an interpretive roadmap into it. Similarly, texts with a pedagogic or directive bent often have to explicitly lay out rules for interpretation to compensate for the asymmetry in competence between author and reader (Crismore and Farnsworth, 1990; Hyland, 1998b).

The form of this guidance, however, is very often genre- and field-specific. The particular literacies and beliefs of different communities are reflected in commensurable variations in practices of communication. In the following section, we explore in what contexts are examples deployed, and how they are articulated for persuasive and explanatory goals.

### 5.2.3 Sequencing exemplification

The texts in our corpus belong to an ostensibly persuasive genre, in which writers do not only seek to make their message comprehensible to a particular readership, but also to gain support for the claims it advances. Achieving this entails not only ensuring a clear communication of the message and fitting it with the world knowledge of the audience, but also structuring it so as to accommodate their beliefs about accuracy, validity and provability.

Within more or less stable discourse communities, one way to secure support

for claims is to signal respect for the shared conventions that mark a common membership (Swales, 1990). In academic research, this often means establishing how the new knowledge fits with the established tenets of the discipline, and explaining its importance for further advance in the disciplinary programme. In practitioner-oriented genres, justifying a given claim hinges instead on showing the advantages it offers for professional practice (Lemke, 1998b). We can expect the rhetorical structuring of persuasive texts to vary in accord with these different emphases.

In our corpus, examples are often used to do work in more than one of these dimensions. They help establish the *warrantability* of assertions by showing instances of real life that correspond to the more general claims. Specific accounts of concrete events draw their authority from their factual character, being unquestionably “something that *actually* happened” (Myers, 1990, 198, emphasis in the original). Examples provide details and specifics that seem amenable to direct confirmation, and thus more reliable than abstract data, whose relation to experience is more mediate and involves the application of theories and models. By presenting information in an apparently empirical form, authors seem not to be doing any classification themselves, adopting instead an ostensibly neutral footing (Goffman, 1979) towards “data”.

When several examples are jointly presented, the multiplicity of instances seems also to warrant the *normality* of the claimed proposition. *Significance* and *desirability* are more indirectly but no less often argued for in this manner; as examples are perceived as typical cases, the features of their presentation and evaluation are made extensive to the entire class.

### 5.2.3.1 Patterns of exemplification

As examples can easily perform multiple rôles, relying on the discursive organisation and the readers' cognitive effort to provide the missing links, texts can be arranged in a highly compressed argumentative structure. Unlike forms of discourse where the boundary between theory and data is thematised —as in

the creation of research spaces in academic prose (Swales, 1990)—, those organised around examples can adopt a regular pattern to systematically condense different rhetorical moves. In our corpus, development involving the following stages seems typical:

1. the presentation of a general *claim*;
2. the *exemplification* of this claim;
3. an *explanation* of its significance, often realised as:
  - (a) a *generalisation* of the example, restating the original claim in a more technical language;
  - (b) a restatement of its concrete *implications*;
  - (c) a *forecasting* of future trends, based on this general claim;
4. a claim of desirability.

This typical structure, allowing for some variations, accounts for over 85% of the paragraphs in the opening chapter of *IR*, and almost the entirety of *UTKA*. Most of the remainder consists of frame markers organising the different sections of the text, as well as the extended introductory examples that we discuss in the following section. Frequent variations include the omission of the third, or more rarely the fourth, move, as well as the cycling of some stages. Presenting more fully the text sampled in Excerpt (1) above, we can see this structure at work (emphasis in the original):

- |      |         |   |
|------|---------|---|
| (1b) | Claim   | [W]e think that content owners tend to be too conservative with respect to the management of their intellectual property. |
|      | Example | The history of the video industry is a good example. Hollywood was petrified by the advent of videotape recorders.        |

	Subexample 1	The TV industry filed suits to prevent home copying of TV programs, and
	Subexample 2	Disney attempted to distinguish video sales and rentals through licensing arrangements. All of these attempts failed.
Implication		Ironically, Hollywood now makes more from video than from theater presentations for most productions. The video sales and rental market, once so feared, has become a giant revenue source for Hollywood.
Desirability		When managing intellectual property, your goal should be to choose the terms and conditions that maximize the <i>value</i> of your intellectual property, not the terms and conditions that maximize the protection

### 5.2.3.2 Indirect and misleading examples

The kind of work performed by this example is rather straightforward in argumentative terms: it helps make the claim *factual*, by linking a general proposition to a real-world instance where it held true. While the example cannot *verify* the rule, it can nevertheless grant it *verisimilitude* and ensure the audience's adhesion. It is interesting to see how the nesting of examples provides recursive support: Hollywood's reluctance is an instance of the global claim about excessive conservatism, and the specific actions of television networks and film corporations are in turn instantiations of this reluctance. Thus, while a single example might have seemed insufficient to warrant a general claim, the nesting of instances widens the base for this support.

In other cases, multiple separate examples are presented:

- (5b) Claim            Any idiot can establish a Web presence— and lots of them have. The big problem is letting people know about it.

Example	Amazon.com, the on-line bookstore, recently entered into a long-term, exclusive agreement with America Online (AOL) to gain access to AOL's 8.5 million customers. The cost of this deal is on the order of \$19 million,
Implication	which can be understood as the cost of purchasing the attention of AOL subscribers
Example	Wal-Mart recently launched the Wal-Mart Television Network, which broadcasts commercials on the television sets lined up for sale at the company's 1,950 stores nationwide.
Implication	Like AOL, Wal-Mart realized that it could sell the attention of its customers to advertisers.
Forecast	As health clubs, doctors' offices, and other locations attempt to grab our valuable attention, information overload will worsen.

The structural similarity between this example and the former obscures a significant difference in the nature of the support presented. In this case, while the general rule concerns the "big problem[s]" entailed in reaching an audience through the Internet, the examples adduced are not cases of problematic situations. They are rather processes that become *textually defined* as solutions to such problems only by their adjacency in textual development. Exemplification substitutes here for the argumentative articulation between problem and solution. The difference is important, in that the episodic character of the evidence leads attention away from the interpretive process involved in the formulation of the data. What the concrete items drawn from the "world out there" (Potter, 1996, 150) do, in discursive terms, has nevertheless very little to do with a straightforward illustration, as the implied premise—namely, that these "problems" can be solved mainly by the expenditure of money—on which all the

passage hinges is never stated. Their ostensible perceptual immediacy downplays the theoretical underpinnings on which the reasoning is based, presenting the relationship as a natural datum.

### 5.2.3.3 Implications of exemplification

Examples overtly or tacitly make a claim of typicality, suggesting the existence of a larger stock of parallel instances. This extensible character is sometimes emphasised through lists; when semantic marking is used to introduce them, the nature of the comparative particle (“such as”, ‘like’, etc.) often entails extensibility, as in Excerpt (4) above. In other cases, there are explicit markings:

- (6) These components typically include a range of assets: data files (LP records, COBOL programs, word processing documents, etc.), various pieces of durable hardware, and training, or human capital

Linguistic cues in both lists signal that the enumeration is not exhaustive.

In traditional logical terms, here the analytic process of intensional definition is replaced with an extensional, ostensible accumulation of cases, leaving the determination of what constitutes a “data file” to the reader. And, surprisingly, when intensional features are presented, they are not necessarily congruent with the perceptible features of the illustrative examples. In the excerpt below, one of the very few cases in which the theoretical rationale behind a rule is explicitly presented, the characteristics of the model it is based on are marginal to the strategic development of the text.

- (7) We use the term *information* very broadly. Essentially, anything that can be digitized —encoded as a stream of bits— is information. For our purposes, baseball scores, books, databases, magazines, movies, music, stock quotes, and Web pages are all *information goods*. [...] Information is costly to *produce* but cheap to *reproduce*. Books that cost hundreds of thousands of dollars to produce can be printed and bound for a dollar or

two, and 100-million dollar movies can be copied on videotape for a few cents.

While the concept of “information” is couched in the arid terms of mathematical theories of communication (Shannon, 1948), thematic development follows a rather different —and far less abstract— direction: the production cost and sales value of “intellectual property”. One should notice that the examples presented are, as in (5), quite unlike the rule they are claim to illustrate: the printing and binding of books is not a digital process, nor is VHS copying, where data are stored in an analogue magnetic medium.

But also the theoretical claims lack a connecting thread; the economic notion of “information goods”, centred on the consumption of meaning, has nothing to do with Shannon’s coding parameters, which entirely disregard semantic aspects.

Despite the incoherence, the rhetorical pairing serves a strategic goal. On one hand, the language of science serves to legitimise the text as an intellectual pursuit, presenting the authors as sophisticated users of complex theories, and soberly hedging their claims by reference to a specific theoretical standpoint. At the same time, it ensures that the particular theory endorsed is not one that readers are likely to challenge— not least because it is largely irrelevant to the main argument. When business concepts —which are more likely than semiotic ones to attract the interest of the buyers of a book subtitled *A Strategic Guide to the Network Economy*— are introduced, none of this disciplinary caution is exercised. The long list of items used to illustrate grounds the text again in reality, and pervasively establishes the mode of the text as one of descriptive *identification*. This shift from an ostensible process of persuasion, in which the validity of intellectual claims is jointly negotiated, to one of apparent description, where the text seems to simply describe the state of affairs, backgrounds the interpretive process exactly at the moment that it begins to be relevant to the text goals.

Onset of first narrative example	Percentage
First word	48.33%
Within first 5% of text	11.67%
5%–10% of text	5.00%
10%–20% of text	1.67%
No examples present	5.00%
Spanning whole chapter	28.33%

Table 5.2: Narrative example usage in introductory chapters ( $n = 60$ )

### 5.2.4 Incipits

Discursive analysis of the rhetorical patterns in academic prose has often suggested that introductory devices do not only seek to *summarise* the main points of the main document or section, but also actively *persuade* the reader to proceed further. Once reading is under way, the weight of the cumulative investment may be enough to maintain the reader's attention, but at the beginning bold persuasive moves may be required of the author to engage their audience. Examples gain their persuasive force from their ability to reconstruct the context of practice. Texts organised around exemplification highlight the immediacy of experience, with all the interpretive patterns that are automatically attached to it by the experienced practitioner, and thus present the insider credentials of the author (Faber, 1996).

The opening of the text is, rhetorically speaking, a very particular position. Beyond what's conveyed in the title and the context model, there is no thematic background to guide the process of interpretation. Framing the message with an example, whose processing always involves a certain degree of interpretive ambiguity, may be more challenging than metadiscursively presenting the structure of the subsequent text, but also sets up a more vivid textual structure than would be otherwise possible. By presenting a narrated situation with little guidance as to its meaning or relevance, the text leads the reader to undertake an exacting process of interpretation; at the same time, the episodic nature of narratives helps provide a schematic structuring, and generates a cognitive tension that impels readers forward. In a sample of 60 texts from our corpus, more



than three quarters employed a concrete narrative for their crucial, pace-setting beginning (see Table 5.2).

Under this conditions, it is the readers' knowledge of the world and their expectations of the genre that provide the main interpretive background, selectively cued and primed according to the purpose of the author. The beginning paragraphs of *IR* challenge their readers to dramatic effect, presenting them with a situation whose familiar character they seek to make evident, and immediately disavowing its identification:

- (8) As the century closed, the world became smaller. The public rapidly gained access to new and dramatically faster communication technologies. Entrepreneurs, able to draw on unprecedented scale economies, built vast empires. Great fortunes were made. The government demanded that these powerful new monopolists be held accountable under antitrust law. Every day brought forth new technological advances to which the old business models seemed no longer to apply. Yet, somehow, the basic laws of economics asserted themselves. Those who mastered these laws survived in the new environment. Those who did not, failed. A prophecy for the next decade? No. You have just read a description of what happened a hundred years ago when the twentieth-century industrial giants emerged.

The effect of this presentation crucially depends on the misunderstanding it elicits on its readers, and its subsequent correction. Hints are plentiful: temporal deictic aside (the book was first published in 1998, when the reference to the end of the century would have been commonplace), the processes described in the passage are recognisably those attributed to the "digital economies" of the Internet era. But, while unequivocal, this recognition is based in a frame of reference that is far from universal. By devising a text only intelligible to readers familiar with the financial media's excitement about Nasdaq and the antitrust case of *United States of America v. Microsoft Corporation*, they make

a point of signalling the ideal reader they seek and the interests that will guide the thrust of the text. The exemplary introduction handles at once the need to ground the text in reality, showing as little interpretation as possible, and the decision to present it already embedded in the cognitive and evaluative habitus of a certain community.

Introducing the subject through a concrete example, instead of deriving its central thesis that “durable economic principles can guide [one] in today’s frenetic business environment” in a more conventional academic way, serves other purposes as well. It is instrumental in portraying the claim as more momentous and daring than it would be within the context of academic business learning, where courses on economics are indispensable (although not extremely popular, being regarded as harder, more theoretical and more quantitative than other subjects; Gregorowicz and Hegji, 1998, 82). In the narrative presentation, the relevant information is distributed so as to provoke both surprise when a certain interpretation of the data is suggested and then challenged, and well-grounded in concrete material.

It also demonstrates the authors’ knowledge of the conventions and interests of the target audience, focusing on preoccupations that readers are likely to have. In a field where the *décalage* between academic interests and practical concerns has repeatedly been shown to be marked (Collins, 2004), this show of familiarity is crucial to establish an identity as a trusted expert. Finally, it enacts the relation of asymmetric competence on which the author-reader relationship is built in a very graphic manner. As the guiding intervention by the authors is strongly backgrounded until the second paragraph, the erroneous interpretation of the situation seems to be entirely the fault of the readers —corrected in turn by the authors’ ability to see through the misleading appearance of events. This is reinforced by the elegant, if deceptive, use of parallelism: all sentences in the first paragraph share the same basic structure, declarative sentences in a definitely *realis* mode, although the “basic laws of economics” are a very different kind of participant from “the public”, “entrepreneurs” or “the government”.

Presenting concrete descriptions and model-bound abstract interpretations in an identical manner, the writers predefine the situation so as to maximise the impact and persuasiveness of their latter assertions.

The short narrative used to introduce the first chapter of *UTKA* also makes extensive use of presuppositions of shared knowledge, a particularly striking instance of which is the opening negative sentence. Negation is often used to implicate that the presented case runs contrary to usual expectations (van Dijk, 1985a, 107); given the particular content it has here, only a reader entertaining the singular belief that “start[ing] a revolution” enters within the goals and capabilities of managers *qua* managers can make sense of the text:

- (9) Christopher Brennan wasn't trying to start a revolution. The regional manager for British Petroleum's (BP) sixteen hundred gas stations in Germany, Chris was looking for new sources of revenue in a saturated, largely commodity-priced business dominated by a few brands. Then he got an idea. [...] Chris had heard about the future of electronic shopping from his colleague Matthias Richly. Why wait for the future? Why not invent it now?

The development of this initial anecdote—that extends over a further 400 words before first shifting out of narrative mode to offer some preliminaries about its goal and theoretical stance—is decidedly iconic in the text's reproduction of the readers' situation. Not only is its participant a manager, as are the members of its intended audience, but also the steps in the narrative development closely mimic the hypothetical stages of his action; temporal markers (“then”, “had heard”, “the future”, “wait”) are mobilised to these effect, while rhetorical questions signal the moments of deliberation in the flow of the action.

Much like we have seen in *IR*, the example itself pushes forward the authors' claims of novelty and relevance. Not only the assertive, “revolutionary” character of the story told conveys this, but also the many evaluations inserted throughout the text:

- (10) [merchants were] *eager to try* a new marketing channel [...]  
They [shoppers] confounded *traditional marketing dogma* by using the kiosk to purchase precisely the kind of goods that *no one expected* anyone would want to buy [...]  
a channel that *conventional wisdom* had told Chris didn't exist.

These analyses make evident the cognitive framework to be used, without thereby breaking the smooth development of the story. Together with the informal language and the iconic narrative structure, the choice of a concrete instance rather than a metadiscursive depiction of the book's arguments align the authors with their readers' point of view. Without necessarily building an abstract model at any stage, the narrative told here nevertheless provides an exemplary pattern to inspire its readers' action.

### 5.2.5 Examples and rule-based argumentation

Underlying the theoretical debates we reviewed in section 5.1 is one of the great issues in contemporary research on psychological, sociological and philosophical aspects of knowledge: to what extent actual cognitive processes can be explained in terms of general rules. While traditional notions of cognition, both in philosophical and psychological research, tended to associate valid knowledge with clearly definable rules for understanding, many contemporary models have challenged this view. In this last section of analysis, we discuss some conflicting positions about this matter that coexist within popular management.

Most of the literature discussing the uptake of these debates has argued that the dispositions and inclinations of practitioners lead them to more conservative ("Whiggish") epistemological positions (e.g. Nickles, 1998, 64) than theoretically-inclined academics. Management is unusual in that radical challenges to rules have not been uncommon among writers, even of a popular kind (Alonso, 2002). This is one aspect in which the discipline remains very much a "fragmented adhocracy" (Engwall, 1995b), showing often irreconcilable differ-

ences among research and practice traditions.

The exemplification strategies we analysed in the preceding sections can often be explained in terms of expected reader preferences; the authors of *IR*, both economists, rely on examples to make their claims factual and persuasive, recontextualising their academic knowledge of economics so as to suit an audience unwilling to invest time and effort in the semiotic resources that economic explanation favours. Business disciplines and economics have, despite their very different professional orientations, a very close bond based on their shared concern with processes of production, distribution and consumption of economic goods. It is thus not surprising that Shapiro and Varian not only draw on the considerable disciplinary capital they possess within the discipline, but also on specific modes of argument and patterns of thinking that are peculiar to economic argument:

- (11) The thesis of this book is that *durable economic principles* can guide you in today's frenetic business environment. Technology changes. *Economic laws do not*. [...]  
 there is order in the chaos: a few *basic economic concepts go a long way toward explaining* how today's industries are evolving

The commitment of the authors to the core disciplinary belief that future events will reflect a pattern that is (a) globally invariant; (b) analytically expressible in terms of systematic laws; and (c) adequately modelable through equations, is evident throughout the text, whose language and quoted authorities all belong to economics (emphases in the original):

- (12) Economists say that production of an information good involves *high fixed costs* but *low marginal costs* [...]  
 Economists say that a good is an *experience good* if consumers must experience it to value it [...]  
 Nobel prize-winning economist Herbert Simon spoke for us all when he

said that “a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention” [...] When the value of a product to one user depends on how many other users there are, economists say that this product exhibits *network externalities*, or *network effects*

Even if its relation to business education and training remains strained, economics has strong discursive assets from which the authors draw: its reputation for exactitude, its prestige within social sciences, its global prominence as a central advisory field in policy and politics. Its strong scientist allegiance is textually made evident in the hypothetical-deductive form the authors favour for their predictions and advice:

- (13) Firms that master this sort of marketing will thrive, while those that continue to conduct unfocused and excessively broad advertising campaigns will be at a competitive disadvantage [...]

The company that best understands information systems and complementary products will be best positioned to move rapidly and aggressively

This position is, however, far from hegemonic among management writers. In developing a taxonomy of gurus, Huczynski (1993) lists consultancy and professional practice in large-scale corporations as sources of authority parallel to that conferred by academia. Their coexistence is not an easy one; a strong current of criticism has questioned the value of these authors' contributions, often portraying it as hero-worshipping, unresearched, arbitrary quackery and pseudoscience (see, for instance, Hilmer and Donaldson, 1996a). While most writers have ignored this criticism outright, traces of it get regularly incorporated into some works, especially those of drawing on more academic identities and authorities. The concluding remarks in *IR* are particularly explicit in this regard, echoing the most frequent criticisms raised against the genre (emphasis in the original):

(14) We've explained what this book is about. We also should say what our book is not about and what distinguishes our approach from others.

First, this book is not about *trends*. Lots of books about the impact of technology are attempts to forecast the future [...] But the methodology for forecasting these trends is unclear; typically, it is just extrapolation from recent developments [...]

Second, this book is not about *vocabulary*. We're not going to invent any new buzzwords (although we *do* hope to resurrect a few old ones) [...]

Third, this book is not about *analogies*. We won't tell you that devising business strategy is like restoring an ecosystem, fighting a war, or making love

We seek models, not trends; concepts, not vocabulary; and analysis, not analogies

Of course, there is much in this kind of assertions that should not be taken at face value.

Claiming "durability" and "proof" for one's own work, in the absence of further arguments, is simply an empty show of commitment to traditional scientific values—the kind of argument that often gets dismissively called "rhetoric". This particular text falls short of its own measuring yard in several respects;<sup>4</sup> we are, nevertheless, more interested in how the comparison serves to demarcate different currents within management writing.

Downes and Mui's attempts at forecasting do not show any of this disciplinary circumspection. *UTKA* is cavalier about the specifics of future happenings and developments, to the point of presenting them sometimes in the present tense, as part of an ongoing but already established process:

(15) Everything having to do with digital technology gets relentlessly faster, smaller, and cheaper [...]

In the future, all the devices you use from day to day will have chips. [...] What starts out as a clever feature of your coffee maker just might

create an entirely new industry model for public utilities.

At the same time, this certitude about the future is curiously coupled with an explicit criticism of systematic analysis and planning. The following excerpt, a dramatic punch line to the extended narrative that introduces the book, clearly states the text's stance towards the interface of theory and practice:

- (16) What does the BP kiosk have to do with business strategy? There was no strategy here, just an idea followed by an experiment. Chris did no long-term planning or detailed analysis of the industry. [...] Perhaps this is your immediate response. A few years ago it would have been ours. [...] What Chris did wasn't strategy, it was just an application, a reordering of relationships. In a word, it was creative. [...] In the new world, that is strategy.

A number of local

and textual

cues indicate the great importance attributed to its crucial proposition: *there are no rules*. The use of personal pronouns and other personal markers is one of the main linguistic realisations in which this is embodied; exclusive "you" clearly establishes a contrast between author and reader, assigning them very different rôles in the text. Hyland (2002, 123) argued that personal pronouns can play a significant rôle in building an image of certainty by foregrounding the presence of the writer in the text, far from the conventional *pluralis modestiae*. This function is emphasised by the contrastive presentation, marking distance between author and reader. Notice as well the rhetorical question, which in English prose and speech is customarily employed to provide a semblance of interaction —bearing the ostensible markings of conversation, where the co-participant is expected to cue in at the end of the turn—, although their basic orientation is directive (Taiwo, 2005). The listener is directed to the point being made, by echoing the process of deliberation presented by the speaker. As such,



the interactional process triggered largely presupposes agreement between the parties, and is very closely bound to its context.

Articulating a reluctance to analyse with the explicit prescriptive goals of the book seems a daunting task. Examples can fill this hiatus by presenting success stories that may spark imitation, while carefully avoiding the extraction of general rules from them. This hybrid form incorporates a number of scientific conventions, much like those behind the model-centred argumentative structures of *IR*, but differs crucially in its framing. In *UTKA*, the suggested “digital strategies” are based on so-called “laws”, eponymously named after entrepreneur-engineers Gordon E. Moore and Robert Metcalfe:

(17) Moore bet his new company on the belief that new generations of chips, with double the power of the previous generation, could be produced every eighteen months. The cost of producing the new chip, according to Moore, would be the same or less than the cost of producing its predecessor, since improvements in manufacturing technology and increased volumes minimized the cost of new facilities [...] Hence Moore’s Law: Every eighteen months, processing power doubles while cost holds constant

Robert Metcalfe [...] observed that new technologies are valuable only if many people use them. Specifically, the usefulness, or utility, of a network equals the square of the number of users, a function known as Metcalfe’s Law. (See Figure 1.2) The more people who use your software, your network, your standard, your game, or your book, the more valuable it becomes, and the more new users it will attract, increasing both its utility and the speed of its adoption by still more users.

Both these descriptions are prime instances of discourse hybridisation between the science and business domains. Moore’s proposition is labeled a “law”, but described in terms of a “belief” whose main claim to validity is Moore’s confidence as shown in basing his business strategy on it. Notice the shift in mood

from the description of precedence to the actual enunciation, where the simple present of the indicative settles it squarely within the realm of timeless general truths. Metcalfe's "law" is presented in the multiple semiotic modalities of scientific assertion, including a plotted graph and an equation; it foregoes scientific conventions in glossing over previous research, which would have proved Metcalfe's to be simply a reformulation of the well-known economic theory of 'interdependent demand'.

However, far more interesting to our purposes is the corollary which Downes and Mui extract from their joint action:

- (18) We refer to these second-order effects, the combination of Moore's Law and Metcalfe's Law, as the Law of Disruption. (See Figure 1.4) It can be simply stated as follows: Social, political, and economic systems change incrementally, but technology changes exponentially. The systems that make up human civilization, including commercial systems, change over time, but they do so on an incremental basis [...] Technology change instead follows the track of Metcalfe's curve [...] It is in the growing chasm between the different rates of change that secondary effects occur [...] Technology change initially affects technology, in other words, but once critical mass is reached, the disruption takes place in other, unrelated systems.

How can the thesis that the conjunction of distinct technological processes tends to spontaneously trigger society-wide disruptions in the form of products and processes whose value and impact could not be foreseen be tied to the book's alleged purpose of providing keys to business strategy? It seems evident that "killer apps", whatever their nature and source, are by definition unpredictable. The challenge this poses for managerial thinking cannot escape acknowledgment. However, the text projects it only as facing "traditional" managerial thinking (see Excerpt (16)); the approach advocated by Downes and Mui seeks to appear unaffected.

The difference between traditional and contemporary management has often been viewed in terms of the mystique of the creative entrepreneur, prominent in the latter kind of writing (Alonso and Fernández Rodríguez, 2006, 137). Analysts have interpreted it as a shift from modern bureaucratic modes of rationality to a pre-modern form of charismatic leadership. However, whatever their inspirational value, purely charismatic justifications of leadership cannot even purport to offer systematic guidance or strategy. The rationalistic elements of the scientific genres can help compensate for this, fitting this trend into the hybrid conventions of popular management discourse.

The use of examples can thus help reconcile the disparate tendencies towards creativity and prescription. On one hand, exemplary anecdotes can be used to depict the unique character of corporate heroes and their personal characteristics in the face of challenge. The story told in Excerpt (9) contains several signs of this depiction: the rhetorical questions present the deliberation of the hero in a manner employed since classical Antiquity; the creative process is foregrounded by the evaluations emphasised in Excerpt (10); the rebellious, independent character of the deed is highlighted by the punchline to the anecdote, ending chapter one of the book:

- (19) Then they did something really radical. They told the folks at BP headquarters what they'd been up to

On the other hand, the relevance of these anecdotes to the readers' own actions is granted by grounding them on shared cognitive frames. As we saw in the opening narratives in Excerpts (8) and (9), the text uses common presuppositions and world-knowledge in its presentation of events and the orientation it provides. Most importantly, these cognitive frames and their interaction are not necessarily made explicit in a systematic whole. The accumulation of examples provides an inductive semblance of a coherent progression, even when—as in Excerpt (7)—the explicitly argued logical properties do not fit the offered examples. As the work of building them into a coherent whole is left to the reader,

with much of their cognitive underpinnings remaining tacit, the inconsistencies and dislocations in the discursive structure are easily glossed over.

### 5.3 Discussion

In this chapter, we have explored the use of examples in popular management texts. We have shown that argumentation structures often follow a cyclical exemplification/generalisation pattern, where the inherent interpretive richness of examples allows them to perform a variety of functions —establishing factuality, significance and desirability, often at the same time— and leading to textual forms less rigidly articulated than is usual in academic prose. We have also shown that the pervasive semblance of factuality conveyed by examples allows writers to embed arguments that would not seem warranted if the interpretive nature of the text were presented as such, multiplying the instances of a remote premise to enhance the credibility of a conclusion, or textually juxtaposing actions in order to suggest cause/consequence relations.

Finally, we have discussed how examples are used to cue common assumptions about the world, evoking a disciplinary frame even for practice-oriented fields where orientation to theory is severely dispreferred. This situation leads to an epistemological curiosity: while sociological accounts of scientific knowledge have routinely found practitioners to be more conservative than academics, in management it is writers from the consulting camp who show more extreme positions as regards the impossibility to establish rules for professional practice. We argue that this has reasons in disciplinary conventions. A model of practice based on conventional, “Whiggish” scientific tenets would hold that examples cannot be correctly assessed or understood without the backdrop of a theory that indicated the relevant parallels and the conceptual features in which the analogy is based; this is in itself an effect of a certain theory of scientific practice, where reflexive mutual control by competing practitioners determines the suitability of a proposal. In managerial practice, this underlying pattern is rather

inferred from the practical effects, in terms of business success or failure, the theory provides.

Discussing a model or technique in terms of its practical results rather than circuitously debating the disciplinary background upon which it was gradually built allows writers to package their arguments in a much more compressed form. This type of textual structure has been called “fast” (Bloor, 1999; Swales, 1990) because it allows writers to dispense with certain justificatory moves, assuming the readers’ knowledge and acceptance of some crucial theses.

Examples allow the writer to take for granted a large part of the interpretive apparatus that will be deployed in understanding the text. Just as (academic) citation practices offload part of the responsibility for the writer’s claims to the cited author, thus ascribing the work to a larger disciplinary tradition in which the intended readers also share, exemplification invokes the common experience of professional practice and the tacit shared knowledge that is put to play in everyday encounters with problematic situations. However, while citations are explicit to some degree about the socially constructed nature of the evidence they adduce, examples tend to frame it as a direct encounter with the facts themselves, a slice of life brought to breathe life to an argument. John Lyons (1989, ix), observing this characteristic, held that examples “qualify as the most ideological of figures, in the sense of being the figure that is most intimately bound to a representation of the world and that most serves as a veil for the mechanics of that representation”.

This is true, in a rather obvious sense, of the *choice* of examples; selecting the specific instances that are supposed to stand in for a more general concept allows the author to stipulate the traits that will be seen as typical, as well as guide the evaluations and reactions towards them. But other discursive features are no less important; selective salience, the specific semantic representation of exemplary features, and the degree and manner in which the example is isolated from or related to its original context are part of the textual work exercised upon the example to turn it into a useful rhetorical tool (Boddington and Hogben,

2006; Worsham, 1999). As with any textual construct, examples never directly manifest facts or data; they employ them for a definite communicative purpose, “reframing them into something that suits the direction of a text” (Lyons, 1989, ix).

A thorough explanation of these differences should go beyond the written text to ethnographically engage the sense-making practices that different players in the management professions employ to orient themselves and define their community membership. But texts reflect them, inasmuch as they signal shared knowledge and the skilled practices, ingrained so as to become a second nature, used to interpret the world. Both in their propositional structure and in their implicit semantics, examples are tightly bound with the goals and values that direct managerial activity.

The research here presented has only begun to examine the surface of these phenomena. Among the strictly discursive research possibilities we have left unexplored is the *directive* potential that examples have for practice. Being interpreted against the backdrop of categorisations that are largely protected from induction, examples do moral work in that they provide a normative model against which readers measure the fitness of their own actions. The directive implications of example usage could be profitably explored through the analysis of personal deictics and other person signals.

From a psychological point of view, the issue of *schema-based* cognition and its relation to exemplary, prototypical or formally regular expressions seems a prime field for further research. It is likely that examples resonate effectively with readers only inasmuch as they follow established patterns of storytelling that are not exclusive to popular management texts, but appear in other domains as well. We have made reference in passing to the *theory theory* approach in cognition, where categorisation is seen as part of a sophisticated process of comprehending the world that takes into account vast amounts of not directly related background knowledge. Introducing practical goals and self-representations into these models would help compensate the shortcomings

that Edwards (1991) and others have decried in more conventional cognitive theories.

Finally, the *contrastive* organisation typical of many of the examples we presented offers great potential. Research in cognitively-oriented discourse analysis (van Dijk, 1998, 267), anthropology (D'Andrade, 1990) and sociology (Bourdieu, 1984) has shown the importance of binary opposition in organising models of the social world and governing action. Binary oppositions may seem arbitrary given the complexity of perceptual experience, but they are crucial in the design of social action in a hierarchically organised world.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Most researchers in this field follow psycholinguistic usage and speak of exemplars rather than examples. For our purposes, both terms are equivalent; we employ the latter for consistence whenever discourse is the subject, reserving the former for strictly psychological issues.

<sup>2</sup>In this chapter we do not deal with the thorny issue of whether exemplary or statistical of evidence is “more” persuasive, not least because making such a comparison in the precise, quantitative manner many of the above-quoted studies pursue requires so much abstraction from discursive and contextual factors as to risk irrelevance. The very sophisticated statistical apparatus employed in some of them obscures the fact that any attempt to extrapolate their results to cases dealing with anything but the reading college students make of issues they neither know nor care much about, in highly stereotyped genres and formats, is likely to be fruitless.

<sup>3</sup>Unless otherwise indicated, all emphasis is ours and has been added for clarification.

<sup>4</sup>Forecasting in the absence of hard empiric data is evident, for instance, at the end of Excerpt (5). The use of analogy is far more pervasive, and especially intensive as regards the “battle” metaphor for business practice. Frequent to the

point of catachresis in financial and business speech (Koller, 2004), the mapping is similar to the “ARGUMENT is WAR” one studied by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). Both “war” (once) and “battle” (six times) feature in the lexical repertoire used to describe market competition in the first chapter of IR; a later one is entitled “Waging a Standards War”. “Rivalry”, “aggression”, “allies”, “sword”, “vulnerable” and the crucial term “strategy”, are other elements reinforcing this set of analogue representations, which is likely to be responsible in no small degree for the vividness and persuasive character of the offered models. It would not be hard to point out other conceptual metaphors underwriting the analysis, such as “MARKET is NATURE”, with its “giants”, its laws of “evolution” and its “breathlessness”. Testing their claims about buzzwords would require cumbersome statistical analysis, infeasible within the limits of this chapter.



## Chapter 6

# Examining leadership through presuppositions

This chapter seeks to explore the use of presuppositions in popular management texts on leadership. The appeal to presupposed beliefs, assumed to be shared by all participants in a given situation of communication, is examined to reveal its rôle in accomplishing the persuasive goals of the text.

Although early theorists assumed that presupposed beliefs must be accepted in advance by all participants in a discourse situation for the text to be acceptable, later models have emphasised the dynamic and flexible nature of these beliefs, showing that presuppositions can be used under certain conditions to update the shared stock of information (Karttunen, 1974) in a process usually termed *accommodation* (Lewis, 1979). Sbisà (1999, 493) has argued that this form of transmission suits admirably well the communication of ideological beliefs— “assumptions, not necessarily conscious but liable to be brought to consciousness, about how our human world is and how it should be”.

We argue that this use of presupposition is central to the success of popular managerial writing, which is concerned with the deontic projection of desirable practices. Presuppositions populate the readers’ model of the world with en-

tities and processes that indirectly but clearly recommend certain courses of action. They both project ideal models for practice derived from the assumed characteristics of existing leaders, and depict the current environment in such a light as to make some decisions and choices appear inevitable.

Exploring the cognitive context of leadership theories, we seek to analyse their unstated premises through a systematic expansion of presuppositions. As presupposed knowledge is less immediately accessible to readers and writers than explicit claims, we suggest that it is a prime location for identifying the ideologies that fuel managerial theory and practice.

## 6.1 Presupposed propositions and prior knowledge

Making sense of a text involves much more than what is present in the text itself. Consider, for example, the following quote:

- (1) It would strike most of our contemporaries as old-fashioned to cry out, “What shall we do to be saved?” And it would be time-consuming to express fully our concerns about the social disintegration, the moral disorientation, and the spinning compass needle of our time. So we cry out for leadership.

There is little challenge in the surface structure of this text. Its syntax is simple, its lexicon standard, its cohesive devices plentiful. But it takes much more than recognising the words, their individual meaning, and their mutual relations, to make the text meaningful. To read and comprehend, readers must be able to relate their reading to their previous experience of things and events in the world (van Dijk and Kintsch, 1983). In this case, they must be able to understand that calling for salvation is old-fashioned because people in the world the author and the reader inhabit do not take moral guidance by religious figures as binding

in their practical concerns, although their grandparents would probably have, or that the dominant morality takes deeds, not beliefs or birthrights, to be the decisive factor in salvation.

None of that information is literally present in the text. It is rather a prerequisite for understanding it— prior *semantic* and *schematic knowledge* that readers must possess to make it meaningful. Identifying the point of text also requires a good deal of *pragmatic* information about the goals the author may have in communicating that information. What is important in a text, and what the reader needs to keep in mind to accurately assess its import is not evident per se, but instead derived from prior experience of similar communicative situations, and of the typical social actions that may be thus performed (Miller, 1984). It is nevertheless difficult to determine exactly what world and schema knowledge a text demands for comprehension (Sperber and Wilson, 1986, 2.2.3.3): the constraints on prior knowledge are subject to a wide range of surface realisations, including zero; shortcomings in background knowledge may be compensated by additional processing effort; and meaning-making is not an all-or-nothing proposition, but rather a complex process that may admit partial comprehension and a range of possible readings.

The study of presuppositions offers one of the few unequivocal windows onto these constraints. Presuppositions are assumptions built into the linguistic surface of a text, which determine what beliefs all participants in a communicative situation are expected to entertain as part of their knowledge in order to make sense of the discourse (Stalnaker, 1973, 1974). Unlike semantic implicatures attached to specific lexical items, presuppositions are pragmatical phenomena, concerning the beliefs that speakers take for granted in designing their utterances (Yule, 1996, 131). Addressees are made aware of these assumptions by lexical and syntactic devices, which act as *triggers* for activating this presupposed knowledge (van der Sandt, 1988). These triggers —of which a fuller list will be given later in section 6.2.1— include definite descriptions, cleft sentences, and wh-questions, all of which are present in our initial example, which can be

said to presuppose:

- (1′) a. Our time experiences social disintegration and moral disorientation  
 b. This is a source of concern  
 c. We experience such concern  
 d. Something must be done to be “saved” from this situation  
 e. It is us who are morally bound to prompt salvation

Presuppositions, then, are linguistic features that encode certain assumptions about the world. Early notions of the phenomenon evidenced their origin in formal philosophy of language in their focus on truth conditions and logical entailment. In one famous definition, the presuppositions of a sentence are all those sentences whose truth is a condition for the semantic value of the first to be either true or false (Strawson, 1949, 175–6). Karttunen (1973) both widened this definition and gave it a linguistic focus in calling presuppositions all the entailments of a sentence that are preserved in its negation. Thus, the presuppositions embedded in the sentence “it would be time-consuming to express fully our concerns about [...] social disintegration” (from Excerpt (1)) are present in the following transformations:

- (1′′) a. It would not be time-consuming to express fully our concerns about [...] social disintegration  
 b. Would it be time-consuming to express fully our concerns about [...] social disintegration?

In all cases, it is assumed that disintegration is taking place, and that we are concerned about it.

### 6.1.1 The common ground

While logical concerns can be satisfied by saying that, unless this is the case, the sentence lacks a truth value, understanding its rôle in communication is more involved. It has been Stalnaker's crucial contribution to frame this in cognitive terms, arguing that presuppositions are those beliefs that speakers take for granted in the discourse context in which they are engaged.<sup>1</sup> This set of shared beliefs is known as the *common ground* (CG) of the discourse. While the notion of mental models has remained largely alien to research in this field (but see Boella et al., 1999), it seems easy to translate this view to the terms of van Dijk and Kintsch (1983) and define presuppositions as those beliefs, not explicitly asserted in the discourse surface (the "text base"), that are nevertheless necessary for the construction of a coherent mental model.

Some theories of presupposition draw from this the strong assumption that all participants in the discourse event should share those prior beliefs for the presupposition to be appropriate or felicitous (Horton, 1987). This explains the intuitive understanding that presupposed information is far from the communicative point of the sentence, constituting rather its background: "one presupposes that  $\phi$  only if one presupposes that others presuppose it as well" (Stalnaker, 2002, 701).

The constraints, however, seem to strict. Beaver (2001) argues that it is uncommon for all participants to have the same view of what constitutes the Common Ground, and that its contents are likely to undergo continuous update and negotiation throughout the discourse event. More acutely, speakers can and do use presuppositions knowing full well that the information they contain is new to the addressees, under the expectation that they will *accommodate* this information by quietly updating their understanding of the common ground to include it (Lewis, 1979).

While not all scholars agree with this view, von Stechow (2000) has convincingly argued that presupposition accommodation can be explained as part of the dynamic update of the common ground that takes place throughout con-

versation: listeners do not need to have the presupposed belief in their common ground before the conversation takes place, but only before they finally acknowledge the presupposition-containing utterance. If the update is understood in two steps —first the presupposition, then the rest of the utterance—, the informative use of presupposition does not seem to pose any problems.

### 6.1.2 Persuading through presupposition

While this might seem to diverge from normative ideals of the communicative situation, where all premises are made explicit for the benefit of the participants, it reflects admirably well the constraints of real speech and writing. The limited time available to participants in normal communication often makes economy desirable, both to help maintain the listeners' attention and to present an agreeable public face by not monopolising the floor. A wise use of presuppositions avoids prolixity and increases rhetorical effectiveness (Stalnaker, 1974),

and, although addressees may always choose to reject the presupposed assertion, this breakdown in conversation is unlikely to be desirable. As Paul Chilton (2004, 64) argues, “[i]t takes effort to retrieve, formulate and challenge a presupposition— the effort being both cognitive, and, since a face-threatening act is involved, also social”. The basically cooperative terms in which communication is normally undertaken makes interlocutors unlikely in principle to undergo the laborious process of focus change and communication reorganisation necessary to assess the presuppositions contained in a given discourse, as the smooth development of the event is often more important than a punctilious revision of all its premises (von Stechow, 2000, 11).

Contextual factors are crucial in determining the willingness of interlocutors to use and accept presuppositions. Not only should presupposed propositions be able to fit acceptably with previous beliefs —that is, be admissible in the mental model of the situation—, but the situation model defining the roles of interlocutors, the goal of the exchange, its importance and its expected development influences the likelihood of different courses of action. Sbisà (1999)

persuasively states that it is local norms of discourse that lead interlocutors to adopt accommodation as a default tendency in order not to lead to communication breakdowns. Both a lack of invested affect or a high degree of entitlement in the speaker may lead a participant to refrain from challenging presuppositions (von Fintel, 2000, 11).

This allows for a persuasive use of presupposition: “When faced with an utterance containing a presupposition inducer, and knowing that the speaker ought to issue it only if the context contains the triggered presupposition (provided he or she wants to keep on communicating with the speaker, and unless there are specific reasons not to do so), the hearer will hold that the presupposition of the speaker’s utterance is contained in the objective context.” (Sbisà, 1999).

### 6.1.3 Presupposing ideologies

One of the main goals of critical discourse analyses has been uncovering the hidden assumptions that structure discourse and social action in general. It is then no surprise that presupposition —which is, so to say, ostensibly hidden— has been often one of its concerns. However, systematic analyses of the phenomenon remain few and far apart, leading Wodak (2007, 206) to claim that “much research in CDA has often neglected the subtle and intricate analysis of latent meanings and has left the interpretation of implicit, presupposed and inferred meanings to the intuition of the researcher”.

Bekalu (2006) speaks of a potentially ideological use of presuppositions when speakers deliberately present questionable or controversial information couched in presupposition, in order to keep it out of discourse focus and favour its incorporation into the shared common ground with little or no critical examination. Although potentially reconstructible from the discourse, a strategic use of presupposition may raise the processing effort needed to do so and therefore bias the normal course of reading against their elucidation.

Sbisà (1999) suggests that presuppositions may be more important in legitimating a challenged ideology than in hegemonic ones. The need to bring them even to partial visibility, through various presupposition triggers or inducers, makes this persuasive effort evident. As this partial opacity protects from analysis views that are bound to a certain position within society —such as social values, norms or ideals— presupposition seems to perform powerful persuasive work for a given social faction, while retaining the guise of simple description.

Both accounts highlight the importance of presuppositions in persuasion and opinion-formation. As Jalbert (1994, 139) claims, it is not presupposition itself that is nefarious, but rather that its partially covert status allows for certain kinds of misuse. In the terms of Fairclough (2003a), the undue extension of the common ground —taking for shared or uncontroversial information that is not actually so— diminishes the dialogicity of a text by restricting the range of potentially available interpretations.

Leadership, a hotly contested topic, seems a subject where these persuasive resources may play a very significant rôle. In the following section we briefly describe the field of leadership studies, before engaging with the corpus used for this analysis.

#### **6.1.4 Leadership in popular management writing**

Although the study of leadership in the managerial disciplines has enjoyed a significant transformation within the past few decades, it is no newcomer to the field. House and Aditya (1997, 464) date the earliest attempts at a systematic approach to leadership in the 1930s, and it has occupied a key place in managerial research and writing from early on. The review of Bass (1990) mentions over 3'000 papers and books dealing with the subject, bearing testimony to its centrality.

This interest goes beyond intellectual curiosity. Theories of leadership have had significant practical impact in the design and development of training programmes for managers that have become an important business in their own.



According to Fulmer and Vicere (1996), a significant majority of medium and large companies in the USA invest in leadership training for their managers, and leadership courses are an important sub-genre in popular management writing. As with all popular management literature, the degree to which this writing follows academic research is variable (Álvarez et al., 1999). Some authors of considerable currency have designed or lent their name to practitioner-oriented texts, while others are more closely based on corporate policies and extra-academic sources than in the produce of business schools.

Despite this extensive coverage, it seems hard to find agreement even in basic conceptual issues. Stogdill (1974, 259) lamented the availability of “almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept”, and the diversity seems to have only increased in the decades since. Most authors agree that influence is intimately tied with leadership, and this basic consensus is reflected in the minimal definition offered by Spencer (2002, 1): “the art of influencing others in the manner desired by the leader”. From this point on, scholars and practitioners diverge. The result seems, despite claims to the contrary by some authors (e.g. House and Aditya, 1997, 464), a rather eclectic farrago of largely unconnected accounts, which draws only occasionally and fragmentarily from related sociological and psychological studies.

In a thorough review of then-current theories, Yukl (1989, 253) bluntly asserted that both empirical support and conceptual rigour were lacking in most studies. Not few venture well beyond description into prescriptive rules and guidelines. While the periodic reviews of the state of the field—to the already mentioned could be added those of Horner (1997); House and Baetz (1979); House and Podsakoff (1994); Jago (1982); van Fleet and Yukl (1989)—have sought to impose some meta-theoretical organisation, integration still remains a distant goal.

Stogdill (1974) offered a first systematic overview, distinguishing three main strands of research. The first of these deals with the *intrinsic characteristics*—whether inborn or acquired—required for efficacious leadership. A second

paradigm concerns itself with identifying the typical forms of *behaviour* exhibited by leaders. Unlike the former studies, more detached and general in character, behavioural studies sought to analyse leaders in action both in naturalistic and laboratory settings. A third and last strand —*contingency* theories— studied not only leaders themselves, but also their context, including the nature of non-leaders and the environment in which they interact.

While most research undertaken nowadays can be regarded as falling under the contingency paradigm, two theoretical orientations deserve special mention for their attempts to go beyond partial models to provide an integrative account of leadership phenomena, namely *transformational* and *neocharismatic* theories. Neocharismatic theories do not focus on everyday practices of management and supervision, but rather explore situations and settings in which leaders achieve unusual and often unexpected accomplishments, as well as producing strong emotional bonds and eliciting great commitment from followers. The difference with transformational theories is mainly one of emphasis: while the former focuses the deeply emotional and personal aspect of the leader, the latter lays more weight on the bringing about of major changes in organisations and in members' own lives.

Of course, this means that the distinction between supervision —providing training, support and feedback in routine activities— and strategic leadership —concerned with determining the overall goals of organisational life— is often tilted in the direction of the latter in actual analysis. The grand processes observed by neocharismatic and transformational theories can be seen as imposing an analytic matrix that brings to research on leadership the fixation on gifted individuals that characterised “great man” history. Instead of allowing the theory to uncover the daily meaning-making practices that form the basis of organisational life, such views are by their own nature bound to cast these results as the work of uniquely gifted individuals. Even when in theoretical terms they subscribe to a view of leadership as a collective activity, rather than focused in an appointed official, some theories of leadership design their analytic

tools in such a manner that only certain exceptional actions remain in sight.

This properly ideological effect is much more common than the explicit claim that only some are “born to lead” (e.g. Cawthon, 1996, 2), and exerts a much subtler and powerful influence in how subjects position themselves vis-à-vis organisational structures. By representing only the deeds of great, heroic individuals, it offers a matrix for thought and action where global effects can only be achieved individually by the gifted. Not all traditional social and political goals can be fitted into such a matrix. Collective action as a political choice, or the cumulative social construction of regulatory regimes to constrain and orient decision, are just two ideals that cannot be understood in these terms— and thus are excluded in principle from discussion conducted according to them (cfr. Alonso and Fernández Rodríguez, 2006, 143).

One way to make a critical use of such analyses would be to “turn ‘great man’ history on its head: to read these mythologised figures as allegories of complex ideological processes, rather than simply re-inscribing [them] as literal historical ‘fact’” (Kurke, 2002, 96). A second option is to reconstruct the cognitive context from which it draws, seeking to make evident the vast knowledge required to acknowledge leadership theories as pertinent or even meaningful. Change at the level of these presuppositions is likely to be much slower and less overt than in explicit theorising. Practitioners and analysts may tend to overlook it, having become encultured to the point of substantially glossing over the issues.

In this chapter, we follow this second route, systematically expanding the presuppositions contained in several popular management texts. In the following section we describe this corpus, and lay out the analytical tools used to examine them.

## 6.2 An analysis of presupposition about leadership

### 6.2.1 Corpus and methods

As we have argued, the presence of a presupposition is normally attached to specific words and surface grammatical structures. Early philosophical works focused solely on definite descriptions, but by the 1970s researchers had identified a vast array of these triggers, which include (Fillmore, 1971; Keenan, 1971; Kiparsky and Kiparsky, 1970; Levinson, 1983):

- *definite descriptions*, noun phrases describing a unique entity and preceded by the definite article, thus asserting the existence of whatever they describe;
- *factive verbs*, those that take a complement whose truth is indirectly asserted, including some —such as “discover”— that Karttunen (1970) called *semi-factives*;
- *verbs of judging*, that may or not be factive —“forgive” is an example of the former, while “accuse” is of the latter kind— but always presuppose a certain appraisal of the situation by the sentential complement’s subject;
- *aspectual verbs* and modifiers, such as inchoative, iterative and change-of-state verbs, that carry presuppositions about the prior state of affairs;
- *cleft* and *pseudo-cleft sentences*;
- *non-restrictive* relative clauses;
- *wh-questions*;
- *comparatives*.

These structures trigger different presuppositions: the existence of a referent in definite descriptions, the truth of a sentential complement in factive and

implicative verbs, the truth of the non-wh part of the sentence in wh-questions, etc. Furthermore, many of these presupposed propositions are subject to contextual cancellation or may not appear in certain situations—the well-known problem of presupposition projection, with which we do not deal here. Both these circumstances make the automatic processing of presuppositions impossible. Nevertheless, their identification can serve as an intermediate step in the unpacking of a text.

The data analysed here are samples selected from the larger corpus constructed for this research project. This corpus was comprehensively sampled to select all works dealing with the subject of leadership. These comprised a total of 12 books, totalling about 3600 pages. Excerpts of approximately 5000 words were randomly taken from each book for the purpose of analysis; natural text boundaries were respected, so the word count of each excerpt varied slightly.

Automated scripts were employed to tag six kinds of presupposition triggers in each text: definite descriptions, factive verbs, aspectual verbs and predicates, verbs of judging, cleft structures, and negatives and counterfactuals. These automated tags were then checked by the researcher, and the relevant presuppositions expanded and tabulated. As the research goals lie in the typical patterns of persuasion in managerial writing, the presuppositions were grouped on the basis of systematic discursive procedures identified in a data-driven examination, rather than according to their formal properties.

Two recurrent designs for persuasion seemed of particular interest: on one hand, the informative use of existential presuppositions embedded in a variety of devices to populate an action script that is not likely to be fully known by the reader. As, in the absence of background knowledge to the contrary, addressees will accommodate the presuppositions in the text, their use in pedagogical genres is a powerful tool in the strategic dissemination of social practices. On the other, the use of factive and existential presuppositions together with addressee-oriented deictics—such as the second-person pronoun—in order to establish collegiality with the reader, both by indexing an unmediated communicative sit-

uation, and by normatively constructing a position for the reader that assumes such knowledge to be commonplace and undisputed.

### 6.2.2 Presuppositions and the social world

The frequent informative use of presuppositions has been well studied in the literature (e.g. Degano, 2007; Mazid, 2007; Wodak, 2007). Presuppositions allow for more agile communication than if all propositions were explicitly asserted, and help prime roles and arguments in the mental model even from the beginning of the discourse. Sbisà (1999) shows how newspaper headlines often use informative presuppositions that can be later satisfied in the following body text. The assumptions encoded in the headline provide a framework for integrating this information by preparing a mental map of the actions.

The case is different, however, when the reader does not possess a general script or schema to make sense of the discourse referent. In that case, presuppositions about typical actors, processes or constraints will be used to populate this mental map. Lacking the world-knowledge required to estimate the fit of the proposed model with the empirical data, the readers will be maximally generous in accommodating the authors' suggestions. Popular management texts deal with a territory that is likely to be familiar to their intended recipients, but at the same time are overtly pedagogical in their intention to provide them with novel methods and frames for making sense of it. They thus have great freedom to posit entities and define processes. Whatever is textually created as factual will likely remain so throughout the mental development of the pertinent model.

The following excerpt from the beginning of Max DePree's *Leadership is an Art* is an interesting example of how definitions of specific situations can be guided by a dense network of presuppositions:

- (2) In a day when so much energy seems to be spent on maintenance and manuals, on bureaucracy and meaningless quantification, to be a leader is to enjoy the special privileges of complexity, of ambiguity, of diversity.

But to be a leader means, especially, having the opportunity to make a meaningful difference in the lives of those who permit leaders to lead.

The presuppositions contained in this paragraph cover a wide range of actors, processes, states of affairs and even moral judgements that are difficult to extricate:

- (2) a. Much energy seems to be spent on maintenance, manuals, bureaucracy and quantification
- b. This quantification is meaningless
- c. This energy is excessive for its purpose
- d. Complexity, ambiguity and diversity are privileges
- e. These privileges are not enjoyed by most
- f. Leading is carried out by permission of those led
- g. Those who do not lead do not make any meaningful difference in their lives

Compared to the ostensible point of the utterance, these statements convey an enormous amount of information, which is nevertheless never explicitly argued for at any moment. Rather, it is taken as the basic premise from which the text proceeds.

It is doubtful whether all readers would unequivocally agree with this assessment. Not only the diagnostic of current problems, but also their alleged aetiology and the prescribed solution are intimately tied with normative conceptions of the social world, of the kind that are rarely homogeneous across members of any given society— ideologies, in the widest sense of the word. In taking them for granted and requiring their acceptance for a meaningful reading of the text, the authors limit the range of attitudes that addressees can adopt towards their text.

Challenging these assumptions would require subverting the communicative situation: shifting the topic from the text's explicit content to the assumptions

underwriting it, and bringing to the fore the competence and honesty of the writers (Greco, 2003, 221). In non-interactive genres such as written prose there is no possibility for the addressee to make such a challenge. Choosing against presupposed meanings means abandoning the reading activity entirely, a dramatic decision that readers who have invested monetary and emotional resources in the purchase of a book might find undesirable. It is certainly a dispreferred option in the normal pattern of reading.

Nevertheless, this may remain a subjectively accessible proposition when the text remains closely aligned with the topics and objects of everyday experience. When the authors claim for themselves or their sources a privileged status, this challenge is harder, and the authoritativeness of the speaker provides a strong guarantee for the truth of the presuppositions, as in the following examples from Michael Useem's *The Leadership Moment*:

- (3) For historian James MacGregor Burns, leadership is a calling. For Peter Drucker, leaders are those whose followers “do the right thing.” For Abraham Lincoln, leadership appealed to the “better angels of our nature.”

These brief, often dramatic quotations from multiple expert and traditional sources are a routine trait in leadership texts, presupposing that:

- (3′) a. Leadership is the subject of expert knowledge  
 b. The authors quoted here possess such knowledge

But these quotations do more than that. They begin to furnish a range of assumptions about the subjects engaged in leadership activities, their various roles and the processes they undertake or undergo that bring precision to this rather vague concept.

- (3′′) a. Leadership is the task of specially selected individuals,  
 not of everyone in an organisation



- b. Leadership entails moral control over those who follow
- c. This moral control is based on inborn traits

There is much that could be termed ideological and thus disputable in such an analysis. However, discussion of these issues is twice removed from the textual focus: once, by attribution to “experts”, better equipped than the reader to provide guidance in these murky waters; yet once more, by their status as presupposed arguments, not subject to a judgement of correctness. Even if the text downplays them later, asserting that no single definition of leadership may fully capture the concept, these elements remain as the basis it builds upon.

Throughout these texts presuppositions of this sort play a major rôle in setting the scene for the intended adhesion of addressees to specific practices and forms of life. Their judgement of the realities of organisational life—which is seldom entirely conscious, and in most cases remains too complex to be fully articulated or contemplated in its entirety—is strongly dependent on these normative assumptions, and on the kind of entities with which this reality is populated. Whatever uncertainty or struggle may there be as to its precise constitution, it is cut short by the use of presuppositions that assume certain standards for its functioning. Take for instance the following excerpt from Orrin Woodward and Chris Brady’s “Launching a Leadership Revolution”:

- (4) Leaders lead for the joy of creating something bigger than themselves. Noted leadership consultant Warren Bennis says that he wants to publish books “that disturb the present in the service of a better future”. That’s good, and it’s a sentiment shared by Hyrum Smith: “Leaders conduct planned conflict against the status quo”.

To illustrate, consider the story of Ray Kroc and the making of the McDonald’s fast-food empire.

- (4) a. Leading creates something bigger than oneself  
b. Leading gives joy to the leader

- c. Leading provokes present discomfort (probably to others)
- d. Leading provokes future improvement
- e. The status quo is upheld by non-leaders
- f. The making of the McDonald's fast-food empire conflicted with the status quo

The projection of a model is evident in this example, with contrasting groups that make up a neatly structured social space. It not only posits a society in perpetual movement as a matter of fact, but also embraces this as a desirable process that invariably brings positive results for both leaders and the led. It also lays out an axiological polarisation, presenting an antagonist (those upholding the status quo), although whether this group comprises all non-leaders or a specific challenger remains unclear. These vague but compelling boundaries are specified by the attached example— a recurring pattern to which we have already paid attention in chapter 5. Even though it is logically and historically possible to envision the corporate expansion of McDonald's as a thorough acceptance of the rules of Fordist capitalism, rather than a challenge to them, the text's use of presupposition helps frame them as a desirable effort at innovation.

- (5) He realized that their little restaurant could be copied and duplicated and reproduced around the nation, and he set about trying to make that happen. Author Jim Collins, in *Good to Great*, explained that great leaders have ambition beyond their own personal self-interest. They are not satisfied with personal success only, but focus almost entirely upon furthering the vision of the enterprise.

Leaders can't stand to leave things the way they found them.

Notice the factive verb, that presents the mechanical reproduction of fast-food organisational procedures as a matter of self-evident discovery, rather than the deliberate planning of the social division of work. Here the repeated advice to

acknowledge the inevitable nature of business, yet personally embrace and adopt it as one's own motto, is repeated in the ambivalence of discovery and change, realisation and self-projection. The enterprise serves as a natural expression of that goal "bigger than oneself" that leaders allegedly seek. The ambiguous genitive, which can take "enterprise" both as an object or a subject, helps conceive of it as a distinct agent:

- (5)
- a. The McDonald brothers' restaurant could be reproduced in great scale
  - b. This is an ambitious task
  - c. This task was not undertaken out of personal self-interest
  - d. This task was undertaken out of a desire for change
  - e. This task was a "vision"
  - f. Personal and enterprise success are distinct
  - g. Enterprise success is a selfless goal
  - h. Enterprises have visions

These presuppositions build up a very particular view of business activity, one that downplays its overt profit orientation, emphasising instead the satisfaction of non-economic goals and the articulation of a wider community. Nevertheless, the means for this expression are economic and, a little later in the chapter, military. What these two fields of endeavour have of competition and other-exclusion is never taken up. The mental model that readers are called to build cuts short any ambivalence or uncertainty as to the potentially harmful effects of business expansion, the inequality in resource allocation stemming from capitalist production, or the existence of organisations based around consensus and collective action rather than hierarchical structuring. Whether authored by old-school inheritors, such as Max DePree, or contemporary consultant-gurus such as Michael Useem, the universe that these texts construct is uniform in this regard.

### 6.2.3 Positioning the reader through presuppositions

In the preceding section, we have seen how presuppositions may be used to fit the actors and processes described in the text into global schemata, with well-defined rôles and clear prognoses and evaluations. We now turn to how the reader is in turn positioned within this context, and how their relation to the authors is constructed. We argue that presuppositional reference to a shared body of knowledge serves to establish collegiality with the reader, signalling at the same time a number of normative expectations about their actions.

Most accounts of discourse agree that, parallel to the construction of the text's topic, communicative situations negotiate and define the rôles or utterer and addressee. Van Dijk (2005, 76) suggested that alongside the semantic situation model a "context model" is used to represent the current interaction. This model is dynamic, and constantly updated with relevant information about the goals, norms and conditions of all participants. The most obvious expression of context management occurs in deictic expressions that are directly context-bound, where participants and their traits are explicitly introduced and addressed as part of the discourse.

However, these features do not appear equally in all genres and situations. In written interaction, most elements in the context are unavailable to the author, who can only partially predict the rhetorical situation in which the text will be finally used. Prose intended for publishing therefore tends to rely on such markers to a much lesser extent than conversation or other verbal forms. When authors nevertheless adopt deictic devices, this carries an indexical reference of a face-to-face format, creating intimacy between author and reader and involving the latter personally in the message. This show of solidarity reinforces the effect of presuppositions. Consider, for example, the following:

- (6) So the very fact that you are interested in developing stronger leadership abilities in a particular area probably means you have some degree of natural ability there already.

- (6)
- a. The reader has leadership abilities in a particular area
  - b. The reader wishes to enhance these abilities
  - c. These abilities are to a certain extent natural

In making overt predictions —however modalised— about the skills and desires of the imagined reader, the writers make a show of interpersonal expertise. Their assessment of the context of reading signals that their knowledge does not only cover the topic at hand, but also the pragmatic needs of the reader in an organisational context, reinforcing the pedagogic impact of the text. Research from academic writing shows that this shared membership in a community of practice is differently reflected in first- and second-person pronouns (Hyland, 2001, 557). Presuppositions about “us” solicit interpersonal solidarity, presenting authors as close to readers’ concerns and having first-hand experience of their tasks and requirements, as in the following:

- (7) Leaders owe a clear statement of the values of the organization. These values should be broadly understood and agreed to and should shape our corporate and individual behavior.
- (7)
- a. Organisations have values
  - b. “We” are members of organisations
  - c. “We” should understand and agree to these values
  - d. “We” act as part of, or representatives of, a corporation
- (8) Leaders owe people space, space in the sense of freedom. Freedom in the sense of enabling our gifts to be exercised.
- (8)
- a. “We” have been granted gifts
  - b. “Our” gifts are not able to be exercised without leadership

Common membership in a professional community is signalled in these texts both by the explicit deictic reference, and by the implicit “contract of coproduc-

tive meaning-making” between author and audience posited by presuppositions (Prince, 1973, 26). Writers treat readers as being, in some respects at least, their peers, to whom not every bit of information must be made explicit.

This solidarity, however, finds its limits in the unequal identities of the expert guru and the organisational learner. When deployed as part of a pedagogic text, presuppositions gain a normative import. Voiced by an authoritative expert, the shared knowledge that they signal is presented as the common sense of the community that the reader aspires to join. It is not certain that all readers adhere to this common sense, but the text’s goal is precisely to bring them in line with it. In this case, the second-person pronoun serves to clearly demarcate the difference in status:

- (9) I would like to ask you to think about the concept of leadership in a certain way.
- (9′) a. “You”, the reader, think about leadership in a different way
- (10) The purpose is to help you and your associates face your own critical challenges, to triumph when your own leadership is put to the test.
- (10′) a. “You”, the reader, face critical challenges  
 b. “Your” leadership is put to the test  
 c. “You” require help to succeed in this test

Presuppositions thus help set the stock of expectations about the reader’s position both as addressee and as eventual participant in leadership processes. The ability of the reader to make sense pragmatic sense of the text is intimately bound with accepting these goals and standards. Unless a very significant cognitive effort is made to reassess the text’s significance, its natural reading will position (Fairclough, 1992, 45) the addressee according to these principles. A powerful form of implicit normativeness is embedded here: the author knows who the reader is in organisational life — and, given the pedagogic slant, who

the reader aims to be— better than readers themselves. The meaning of the readers' actions and desires are thus laid out, without ever subjecting this guidance to an explicit test or formulating it in a direct manner.

In Excerpt (10) above this normative character is compounded by the urgency in facing “critical” challenges. Conveying this urgency through presuppositions —especially change-of-state predicates and comparatives— allows writers to persuasively establish the menace of a grim future as commonly accepted knowledge:

- (11) Finally, managers everywhere face more turbulent times as they negotiate their way through a world of greater ambiguity and less certainty.
- (11/) a. Turbulence has increased in our times  
 b. Ambiguity has increased as well  
 c. Certainty has decreased

Or they may remain similarly underspecified by appearing as the actions of the (presupposed) antagonists of leaders:

- (12) Leaders must take a role in developing, expressing, and defending civility and values.
- (12/) a. Civility and values are underdeveloped and under attack

It is anyone's guess what may be the objects and subjects of these phenomena of “turbulence”, “uncertainty” or “attack”. Some of them will receive illustration later in the book in the guise of examples, but by then the assumption that great dangers face those who do not comply with organisational prescriptions will be well established:

- (13) We all need to be ready for those moments when our leadership is on the line and the fate or fortune of others depends on what we do.

- (13/)
- a. All of “us” are leaders
  - b. The fate and fortune of others depend on “us”
  - c. All of “us” face moments when our leadership is at risk
  - d. “We” are not ready for those moments

Such an argumentation does more than insinuate that readiness and decision might be useful traits in the readers’ professional lives. It casts a wide network of presuppositions that negatively evaluate readers’ capacities, but above all the present state of the world, and raise dire warnings for those not heeding the author’s recommendations. The writers’ superior knowledge —established in his authoritative description of their audience’s concerns— lend weight to these predictions. Not only is there no alternative to the hierarchical division between leaders and non-leaders, but readers should be constantly alert to the risk of not living up to the expectations of their rôle. Failing to comply with the authors’ prescriptions may not only bring “us” down, but also our entire world.

### 6.3 Discussion

The manipulative potential of presuppositions was known well before a robust linguistic theory for identifying and describing them became available. Frege’s early example of *der Wille des Volkes* “the will of the people” (quoted in Greco, 2003, 218) was already a tentative analysis of the complexities introduced in argumentation by presupposing that there may be such a thing as a unitary will shared throughout the social body. In the previous section, we have sought to show how writers populate their description of the world with such presupposed entities, and classify them in structurally related categories through coordination, opposition and subordination.

These presuppositions are dialectically related to the specific ideologies that characterise the managerial community. As a form of situated social action, they depend for their pragmatic felicity on their being —at least in principle— coherent with the global models about the nature and structure of society that



are prevalent in this community. At the same time, and thanks to the constraints introduced by the specific context of expression —written media authored with a clearly pedagogic purpose, making extensive use of implicit cues to guide text comprehension in a reading situation in which the reader is likely to have invested economic and affective resources—, they help reproduce and instantiate these models in the scripts and plans for action they imbue readers of.

An interesting corollary of the above is that the pragmatic purpose of the presuppositions should be clearly differentiated from the strictly semantic aspects of the triggered propositions. The large majority of presuppositions in our corpus are of a factual nature, updating the common ground with information about the alleged existence of entities through definite descriptions or sentential complements to factive and implicative verbs, rather than overtly evaluative, such as those triggered by verbs of judging.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, there can be little doubt as to the modally deontic character they take within the larger textual structure.

Sirpa Leppänen (2003, 56) makes the point that pedagogic discourse is necessarily moral in nature, since it projects an image of human character that guides the development of the self. Although presented in factual terms as a compendium of the accumulated wisdom of a discipline, it becomes deontic as these statements of fact are framed as goals that the addressee must live up to in their own practice. In so doing, it removes these normative character from the social and historical structure that gave rise to it, and universalises it as a context-independent prescription. This is clearly at play in popular texts on leadership, where the recurring claim that the furnished recipes should come to be used in “[our] own critical challenges” works to establish general patterns that the reader should heed.

In more general terms, this challenges the dichotomous distinction between statements of fact and statements of value, and the often attached assumption that the former are entirely objective while the latter depend simply on personal preference. Constructivism and critical realism have methodically and convinc-

ingly argued against the objective character of factual assertions —claiming that proof and evidence are the result of socially developed standards—; the rôle of factual statements in deontic evaluation has been less thoroughly analysed.

We would like to suggest that this modulation between the descriptive and the prescriptive is one further element in making the evaluative import of these texts implicit, and thus protecting it from critique. If the evaluative choices in these texts are not necessarily shared in their entirety by most readers, construing them as given facts that must be acknowledged to understand the text is a strategy that aspires to silence critique and progressively establish them as common currency.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Simons (2003) notes that Stalnaker's views are much more complex than usually described; this chapter is no exception, as accounting for all the nuances of his position would take us far from the purpose of our research. We believe that nothing crucial is lost in this simplification, however.

<sup>2</sup>This may be because these presuppositions involve communicating the judgments of another, while our texts seemed powerfully monologic in that regard. Authors incorporate the voices of experts through quotations, such as those we presented in Excerpt (3), but these are often very brief and limited to introductory sections. They embed the sayings of characters in their narratives, but for the most part these are instances of *doing* leadership, not reflecting on or evaluating it.

## Chapter 7

# Conclusions

In this chapter, we summarily discuss the global findings of the thesis. As each of the papers it contains was designed to be read independently, a discussion section is already presented in each. The following chapter provides a general summary of these, briefly laying out the general textual properties of the genre. We then relate these findings to the theoretical framework and objectives laid out in the general introduction, before briefly noting the main limitations of this work and mentioning some interesting directions for further research.

### **7.1 Some findings about the genre(s) of popular management literature**

Our research on titles was premised on a constructivist notion of communication and knowledge. Although the positivistically-informed epistemology that has been long dominant conceives of texts as contingent wrappers for independently-existing thoughts, and thus regards their semantic content as their sole relevant category, contemporary research has shown that this is just one factor in the process of text comprehension. Texts are not synonymous with their meaning, but rather a set of semiotic instructions for the process of meaning-making

addressed to a specific audience, endowed with its own knowledge, interests and habits. Communicating involves tailoring the text to these properties.

A pragmatically-oriented analysis of titles sought to reveal the canonical properties of readers of popular management texts. Brief, memorable, often intriguing titles are used to solicit the attention of readers who are not committed in advance to a specific topic or school of thought. The practical bent of these texts is made evident in the relatively frequent omission of content summaries in the title, while the benefits it offers or its guidebook nature are often emphasised. This speaks of the readers' interests, quite unlike those of conventional academic prose. The asymmetric competence presupposed in popular management books favours the adoption of a direct prescriptive style. Nevertheless, grammatical resources are employed to foster an appearance of description, skilfully blending expository and normative contents.

This results are interesting not only for what they reveal about popular management literature, but also for the theoretical point they make in undermining simplistic distinctions between substantiated, academic knowledge and frivolous guru theory. The difference between academia and popular writing is not equivalent to the one between information and persuasion. Rather, all forms of argumentative communication involve the persuasion of an audience. Academic and popular management texts select different strategies for the same because they address different audiences, or different needs of the same audience. Any critique of the ill effects of popular prescriptions should bear that in mind if practical improvements are to take place.

Similar evidence results from the analysis of how authors project a contextualised understanding of their own communicative practices through metadiscourse. Metacommunicative interventions are not intended simply to guarantee the intelligibility of the text, but more crucially to ensure that the perlocutionary objectives pursued by the author are adequately achieved. By displaying how the writer modulates their claims and statements in order to honour the expected beliefs and attitudes of their audience, it provides a window into the

pragmatic process of mutual engagement between audiences and authors.

Metadiscourse in popular writing is exceptionally dense, and especially rich in overtly interactive features. Not only does it show no qualms in personalising the process of knowledge construction and communication far beyond what is usual in academic prose, but it constructs rôles for readers and authors possessed of a distinctly normative bent. Appeals to the moral sense of the audience, through modal verbs, appraisals and a heavy emphasis on second-person pronouns, are of special significance.

Interestingly, the specific tone of popular writing seems to be partly designed to explicitly differentiate it from academic prose. Ideological beliefs about professional identities (*styles*, in Fairclough's (2003) terms) are an important part of the construction of a specific form of discourse. That of managers is not simply designed on different grounds than academic communication, but also planned (partly, at least) as an alternative take on knowledge development. This, in turn, hints at a deeper contrast between practical management wisdom and detached academic abstractions that is fostered by the managerial order of discourse. While a comprehensive account of this shifts would require more precise linguistic tools and systematic attention to contextual features, the analysis of metadiscourse helps formulate hypotheses to guide further research.

Differences between academic and popular writing are also apparent in the use of narratives. While storytelling is an engaging pedagogic device and is often employed in lectures (Dyer and Keller-Cohen, 2000; Strodt-Lopez, 1993), it is not expected to be integral to the process of knowledge making. Anecdotes and personal experiences may introduce evidence or relieve the tension in complicated argument, but in disciplinary formulations they are erased, together with all traces of contingency. However, workplace discourse polices less rigidly the presence of a subjective imprint, and allows for more fluid boundaries. Especially important are epistemic narratives recounting the journey from ignorance to wisdom.

Despite the interest in narratives in organisational research, modern dis-

course analytic technique have not often been applied. Analysis of the distribution of self- and other-judgements, as well as descriptive lexis, show how authority is constructed through the joint presentation of an acting and an epistemic self. While the former is depicted in dramatic or humorous terms to maintain attention, authorial authority is preserved through the judicious distribution of evaluative clauses throughout the text. The depiction of real-life authority is also an essential part of these narratives; although it could be found presumptuous or otherwise problematic in other genres and media, authors of popular management books are conspicuous in portraying themselves in exemplary situations or at the forefront of innovation.

Shifts in grammar and lexis provide a counterpoint to this, recalling the author's human side, but are also useful in downplaying the heavily interpretive nature of narrative reporting. An omniscient position for narration helps dissimulate the previous assumptions that authors bring to the interpretation of data, and promotes them as universal and incontestable. Detached focalisation favours the transmission of moral norms and the formulation of general principles. Together with the nature of the narrative form, which tends to be interpreted in stylistic and not cognitive terms, these are powerful elements in establishing the authoritativeness of the presented interpretation.

Narratives used in explicit argumentation, in turn, serve a variety of functions. The multiple pragmatic goals that can be simultaneously accomplished by storytelling due to its multiply layered structure allow writers of popular management to rely frequently on a cyclical exemplification/generalisation pattern, where examples establish significance, desirability and factuality, often at the same time. The latter is, however, often the most important of these, allowing writers to embed arguments that on closer inspection would seem unwarranted.

In more general terms, examples are used to cue background assumptions about events and processes that are not necessarily made explicit at any point. Within the field of popular management doctrine, the inclination to theorise explicitly is not unknown, but represents only one of the possible disciplinary

orientations. Writers endorsing the more post-modern variants within the field are unlikely to engage in such an effort, which is portrayed as reminiscent of antiquated, “rationalist” theories about organisational behaviour and strategy. Exemplification allows them to provide a counterpoint to pure emphasis on charismatic inspiration, while never presenting explicit models for their reasoning.

Presuppositions and shared world-knowledge serve to ground these theories in a common conception of managerial activity. This both legitimises the authors’, showing their familiarity with the business world in terms understandable to their readers as well, and helps maintain the cognitive underpinnings largely tacit. Identifying incoherency or imprecision is thus considerably harder, requiring the reader to elaborate a formal model out of the hinted premises. Unlike academic citation practices, which serve a similar function of offloading cognitive processing, exemplification is often silent about the socially constructed nature of the evidence it provides. They are thus a highly ideological figure (Lyons, 1989, x), and one ideally suited to the transmission of tacit beliefs about social nature.

The study of presuppositions about leadership is further developed in the last chapter, where the practical projections derived from existential and evaluative assumptions is explored. Presuppositions on the topic are not absent in academic theory, where, for instance, seldom formalised beliefs about the nature of leadership tends to obscure the daily meaning-making practices that form the basis of organisational life in favour of the exceptional acts of “gifted” individuals. Moreover, these are less subject to change and explicit contestation than overt assertions. However, the didactic structure and low reflexivity of practitioner-oriented publications carry this obscurity to an extreme.

A systematic exam of presupposition triggers reveals recurrent patterns of deployment. Existential presuppositions are used to construct a model of the actors and processes that are likely to happen in situations for which the reader does not have a fully developed model, especially the kind of problematic or

highly exacting situations that may strike an organisation in crisis. Lacking background knowledge with which to challenge these assumptions, they become integrated into recipes and scripts for action, thus leading to their strategic dissemination. Ideological conceptions based on a socially-determined take on the world become hegemonic through such processes of covert diffusion.

Other presuppositions are used in a more overtly normative manner by closely associating their prescriptions with contextual features through the use of deictics. Presupposed knowledge about the reader, addressed by the second-person pronoun, helps establish a collegial situation in which the author's acuity and penetration is manifest in their intimate knowledge of the readers' desires. Knowing the readers even better than themselves, the author can freely project imperatives on their future actions without fear of challenge. Strong negative evaluation is used to heighten the urgency and drama of managerial activities, as they are construed by the author. Both kinds of presuppositions are instrumental in fostering ideologies that go largely unexamined and that may exert great influence over the future actions of readers and their organisations.

## **7.2 Expert knowledge in popular management literature**

The papers presented in this thesis set out to describe the relationships between popular management theory, language, and the social arrangement of labour and business practices under late capitalism, when then production and consumption of symbols has become an essential part of the economic system. Accordingly, the pursuit of this objective takes the form of a critical examination of the textual properties of the media through which this theory is disseminated and offered for appropriation, popular management books.

Our analysis has dwelt on the pragmatic and cognitive aspects of this language. We have appraised how writers negotiate the usefulness and adequacy of their texts with their audience even from the title, which prominently displays



genre knowledge and locates both author and readers in a culturally shared framework of practice; how meaning-making is skilfully controlled throughout the text by judicious metadiscursive intervention, in which the strong imprint of authorial identity is paramount; how this identity is negotiated at a number of levels, both through explicit self-representation in embedded narratives and through the indirect markings of authorial voice in interpretation and orientation; how exemplification serves to ground normative arguments in a semblance of facticity, embedding interpretive premises and evoking a disciplinary frame for interpretation without ever explicitly formulating a general theory; and how presuppositions of a largely factual nature are systematically employed to provide pedagogic and deontic guidance for readers, detaching them at the same time from the socio-historical background that undergirds them.

The overt social function of popular management texts is to make widely available the state-of-the-art means for conducting business in contemporary society. As a corollary, and given the difficulty in evaluating the factors of business success in isolation, popular management writing becomes a kind of normative knowledge policy on economic behaviour. It defines a contemporary canon for legitimate management skill, providing guidelines for identifying the people and environments where such a skill is produced, and legislating on the model of competence that defines the appropriate business actor. Through its ever widening diffusion, it deploys a socially-grounded model of competence as a general paragon for social action. The analyses in this thesis have identified factors that contribute to this diffusion and to the emergence of a specialised but widely influential form of expert knowledge, endowing gurus with the authority to regulate the production of meaning.

Our immediate goal in the thesis had to do with the linguistic realisation of this authority. Drawing on genre theory (Hodge and Kress, 1988; Miller, 1984, 1994) and socio-cognitive approaches to discourse processing (van Dijk, 2005, 2006a,b; van Dijk and Kintsch, 1983), we have worked on the premise that routine rhetorical interactions create recognisable discourse spaces that be-

come a (social) norm for those who acquire their professional knowledge through them. Just as academia has its tribes (Becher, 2001) —with their nomenclatures, repositories of knowledge and conventions for inquiry (Bizzell, 1982)—, and the knowledge of the tribe’s conventions is a prerequisite both for understanding the value of others’ contributions and for being able to adequately contribute to the disciplinary stock, so does management. We have sought to describe at least a few of these conventions— and how they distinguish the strongly asymmetrical field of popular management writing, where readers are expected to recognise the tacit conventions of communicative practice but not to engage in critique or contestation, and the ostentatiously egalitarian realm of academia. Although we are as yet far from attaining a full description of the resources that define popular management genres, a general outline of the feats of disciplinarity that allow a writer to present themselves as a legitimate authority and textualise their work within this community is at least partly available.

These goals were linked to the proximate intent to analyse how the creation of management knowledge as a socially influential resource affects the status of knowledge in general and of knowledge about society and its organisation in particular. Lemke (1995, 78) convincingly argues that science, art and politics are the three “prestige orders of discourse” in our culture, with the authority to compel belief because of their monopoly on the definition of a transcendental value: truth is the province of science, beauty that of art, and good that of politics. However, even if the autonomy of politics as a field for negotiating social goals had ever been so clear-cut, it has been severely hampered over the past decades. Much of the debate about globalisation, for example, has centred on whether the social changes it entails —reducing the cost of labour, reducing public expenditure and flexibilising work, among others— are really technical imperatives dictated by (scientific) economic laws, or are properly political decisions to open up the welfare and labour systems to pure market logic (Alonso, 2002; Bourdieu, 1998b; Fairclough, 2000a). This goes to show that the frontier between these orders of discourse is less rigid than it would

seem, and social issues pass with relative freedom from one domain to the other.

The layout of these frontiers is, in fact, one of the objects at stake in discursive struggle. Although disciplines are speciality fields, and the discourse that goes on within them is for the most part motivated by their intrinsic logic, its effect is also exerted in the wider community. No matter how specialised the form of social and symbolic capital, it is liable to transformation and investment in other domains.

On a very immediate level, management knowledge wields significant influence because of its intimate association with a source of power with an immediate effect on people's lives: the regulation and control of workplace activities. It is a form of elite discourse (van Dijk, 1993a), from which power flows quite directly in a technocratic social arrangement. But the fact that this power alone is unable to regulate the labour process was already evident in the 1970s (Braverman, 1974; Zimbalist, 1979). Workers themselves must adopt, at least partially, this knowledge as their own in order for capitalist relations of production to be sustained (Littler, 1982). The crucial endowment of managerial discourse is thus its capacity to elicit acceptance and therefore voluntary compliance—what classical sociology termed *domination* Weber (1922).

The degree of this domination cannot be doubted. The thoughts and lives of managers attract widespread interest and function as behaviour models, and not only for their high level of income (Collins, 2000, 71). Managerial theory and doctrine become resources that subjects use to make sense of themselves and their experience of the world not only within the vast though limited domain of work, where they may be enforced by institutional constraints, but also outside it. The project to disseminate these resources and maximise the breadth of their application is, at least, partially evident in managerial texts themselves at a number of levels:

Firstly, the emergence of the popular management press itself is symptomatic of a process of diffusion that goes well beyond the communication of technical novelties to disciplined cadres that Boltanski and Chiappello (1999) suggest as

constitutive of the genre. No matter how broadly the task of strategic management is defined, its practitioners do not account for the three million copies that *In Search of Excellence* sold in the four years after its publication. Research on the management advice industry has shown how products are designed to target the broadest possible reader base, including many that do not need the practical recommendations that the text may bring but rather the general, ideological principles it conveys.

Secondly, the semiotic characteristics of these texts —the immediate object of our analysis— are intended to engage the audience through scripts and schemata imbued of managerial principles. From the reader position constructed by the preponderance of imperative forms, to the implicit assumptions about professional orientation and activity encoded in presuppositions, to the interpretive guidelines for assessing success embedded in the telling process, management literature is designed to be understandable only if the premises of contemporary capitalism are accepted. It does neither discuss them, nor even provide a recognisable textual locus where such discussion could possibly take place.

Lastly, the extension of the concept is explicitly conducted in these books' content. As Burchell (1993, 275) claims of liberal political doctrine, popular management books promote “the generalization of an ‘enterprise form’ to *all* forms of conduct— to the conduct of organizations hitherto seen as being non-economic, to the conduct of government, and to the conduct of individuals themselves”. The constant juxtaposition of labour and everyday life and the exemplary use of managerial criteria for understanding the latter are only part of the diffusion of a managerialist ideology.

### 7.3 Limitations and directions for further research

The object of this research—the construction of an expert system of knowledge and its deployment at a very broad scale through publications addressed to the public in general—is only partly linguistic. While discourse analysis was chosen as a suitable approach to providing an initial sketch of the phenomenon, no amount of attention to textual properties can adequately describe the uses to which these texts are put, nor the cognitive and interactive strategies that are at play in their reception, interpretation and recontextualisation.

Careful attention to textual detail is a necessary addition to a field of study where “discourse” is often only a shorthand for the semantic gist of a series of text, barely grazing the surface of its semiotic properties. Nevertheless, an accurate representation of the process of semiosis requires as well systematic fieldwork to explore how meaning is made at all stages of text production and consumption. Van Dijk (2008a,b) has insisted that all semiosis is intimately bound to contextual features, as they appear in the subjective meaning attached to them by individuals, and the commitment to go beyond the text by establishing links between discourse activity and other forms of social practice is commonplace in CDA (e.g., Fairclough, 1995, 9). Ethnographic research at all sites where discourse is conducted and used is an essential requirement for a complete understanding of what its linguistic properties mean.

The present study makes no advancement in that regard. Although drawing on the little extant empirical research on discourse use and consumption in managerial circles, its reconstruction of the readers’ strategies of comprehension and appropriation remains largely speculative and text-driven. It is intended to flesh out certain very general beliefs about popular management writing developed in the sociological literature and thus open the way for more precise, contact-oriented research, but does not achieve by itself a developed empirically-based model of users’ practices and beliefs.

Unsurprisingly, the main conceptual results of the work remain vague. As an exploratory study, the current project of research lacks a precise set of categories for expressing the systematic relations between semiotic media and sociocognitive categories as they occur in management. They serve as global indicators for possible directions that interpretation may take to comprehend the nature of the management system, but often they remain at the better-developed analytic level of contemporary capitalism in particular and do not engage with the specifics of managerial thought.

It is doubtful that the resources for achieving this full mediation can be obtained, unless by detailed empirical examination of the different genres of managerial literature and the variations in their production and use. The design of the corpus and the lack of a robust classificatory scheme prevented a genre-based approach in this work. Even if the fluid boundaries and incomplete closure of popular managerial genres—as compared with more technical and institutionalised texts, such as the mission statement (Swales and Rogers, 1995) or the annual report (Hyland, 1998a)—make the identification of canonical sequences of rhetorical moves unlikely, a finer-grained classification than the simple model employed in this work would be an important milestone in this strand of research. The suggestions of Fernández Rodríguez (2007), not available at the time of this thesis' commencement, should prove very useful in this regard.

Of course, even in this case, it is likely that great stylistic and conceptual rifts remain within genre boundaries, and that a single dominant model not be obtained. Such a model may neither be feasible nor practical because of the fragmented and conflict-driven state of the discipline of management. But an adequately broad and qualitatively-oriented form of analysis may help understand the rôle that such rifts play in the dynamics of the profession, articulating the different self-representations of the many actors involved: consultant-gurus, academic gatekeepers, critical scholars, prestigious practitioners, lay readers, editors, etc.

From the above it seems clear that the directions for further study in the subject of expert managerial knowledge and popular writing lie along the following lines:

- further research is obviously needed regarding the *use* of popular management texts. Except for fragmentary, small scale studies such as those of Pagel and Westerfelhaus (2005) or Álvarez and Mazza (2000), we have only very limited ideas of how readers discover and select management books. Close investigation should be made of the kind of reading process customarily preferred and of the range of variations. Moreover, relational categories should be developed to account for how and where these texts are used, e.g., by incorporating them to the reader's professional practices, by employing them as arguments in workplace or other discussions, by sharing them with like-minded colleagues, etc. An important factor in this research concerns the process of recognition and classification of popular management texts, as undertaken by readers, and the construction of their relationship with alternate sources of managerial expertise. The ultimate goal of such an investigation would be tracking the adoption of a managerial frame of thought through secondary socialisation;
- conversely, research on the production of management texts is also of paramount importance. Subjective accounts by authors of the reasons for writing in this genre; of their expected and intended audience; of the process of text design; and of the gatekeeping practices that they have to face would shed significant light on the position of authors, which is often simplified in analyses to the point of caricature. The work of Clark and Greatbatch (2004); T. and Greatbatch (2002) offers a good point of departure for this endeavour;
- more detailed research on the semiotic and generic properties of management texts is as important as contextual enquiries. The highly salient lexis (jargon) of managerial practice, partly drawn from these texts, is

one of the most frequently noticed traits of its linguistic structure. However, it remained unexplored in this study, among other reasons because a good definition of “jargon” is hard to attain. The extant literature (e.g., Watson, 2004) has done little to provide criteria for identifying managerial jargon, and for assessing what is normally perceived as such—which is not necessarily identical. Genre patterns are, as mentioned above, another important and largely disregarded source of information. The management novel, for example, or the biography of the hero manager (Huczynski, 1993, 53) have been often noted, but never systematically described. Other important semiotic aspects that lend themselves to systematic analysis are appraisal, agency, and visual layout strategies;

- the intertextual relations between popular management books and other media can show the process of recontextualisation that takes place with the circulation of ideas at a broader scale than any specific ethnographic setting affords. The semiotic and semantic shifts involved in transforming (mainly expository) books into training materials, audiobooks and videos, for example, can be used as signposts to triangulate the analyst’s interpretation of the texts’ pragmatic purpose. Also informative is the re-use of content from popular management texts in other media, especially the press. Álvarez et al. (1999) note that management content has experienced a marked increase in general-purpose newspapers and magazines, but its specific contents, sources and the discursive process of adaptation are still largely unknown;
- finally, research on the form and loci of contestation of management discourse is needed. Although by no means an actual challenge to its hegemony, management discourse elicits a hefty dose of rejection and ridicule among subordinates, the media and public intellectuals. Not only its jargon is often depicted in derisive or humorous terms (e.g., Watson, 2003), but also the entire process of faddish theory diffusion is partly evident to



workers, and they often react with surprisingly critical positions (Armstrong, 1986). However, both the (subjectively attached) causes and effects of this criticism have received little empirical attention.

Of course, such a list is far from complete and exhaustive, and the projects it lists are still essentially conceived from the standpoint of a (critical) discourse analyst. Doubtlessly, the success of such a programme for research involves overcoming such disciplinary barriers and engaging effectively with scholars with complementary interests and resources. If only to draw attention to the aspects in which language and discourse can be analysed to achieve greater understanding of broader social processes, the contributions made in this thesis will hopefully be of use to future research in the field of Critical Management Studies

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## Appendix A

### Excerpt from *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*

On the morning of December 8, 1997, the government of Thailand announced 1  
that it was closing 56 of the country's 58 top finance houses. Almost overnight, 2  
these private banks had been bankrupted by the crash of the Thai currency, the 3  
baht. The finance houses had borrowed heavily in U.S. dollars and lent those 4  
dollars out to Thai businesses for the building of hotels, office blocks, luxury 5  
apartments and factories. The finance houses all thought they were safe because 6  
the Thai government was committed to keeping the Thai baht at a fixed rate 7  
against the dollar. But when the government failed to do so, in the wake of mas- 8  
sive global speculation against the baht — triggered by a dawning awareness 9  
that the Thai economy was not as strong as previously believed — the Thai cur- 10  
rency plummeted by 30 percent. This meant that businesses that had borrowed 11  
dollars had to come up with roughly one-third more Thai baht to pay back 12  
each \$1 of loans. Many businesses couldn't pay the finance houses back, many 13  
finance houses couldn't repay their foreign lenders and the whole system went 14  
into gridlock, putting 20,000 white-collar employees out of work. The next day, I 15  
happened to be driving to an appointment in Bangkok down Asoke Street, Thai- 16

land's equivalent of Wall Street, where most of the bankrupt finance houses were 17  
located. As we slowly passed each one of these fallen firms, my cabdriver pointed 18  
them out, pronouncing at each one: "Dead! . . . dead! . . . dead! . . . dead! . . . dead!" 19

I did not know it at the time — no one did — but these Thai investment 20  
houses were the first dominoes in what would prove to be the first global financial 21  
crisis of the new era of globalization — the era that followed the Cold War. The 22  
Thai crisis triggered a general flight of capital out of virtually all the Southeast 23  
Asian emerging markets, driving down the value of currencies in South Korea, 24  
Malaysia and Indonesia. Both global and local investors started scrutinizing 25  
these economies more closely, found them wanting, and either moved their cash 26  
out to safer havens or demanded higher interest rates to compensate for the 27  
higher risk. It wasn't long before one of the most popular sweatshirts around 28  
Bangkok was emblazoned with the words "Former Rich." 29

Within a few months, the Southeast Asian recession began to have an effect 30  
on commodity prices around the world. Asia had been an important engine 31  
for worldwide economic growth—an engine that consumed huge amounts of raw 32  
materials. When that engine started to sputter, the prices of gold, copper, alu- 33  
minum and, most important, crude oil all started to fall. This fall in worldwide 34  
commodity prices turned out to be the mechanism for transmitting the South- 35  
east Asian crisis to Russia. Russia at the time was minding its own business, 36  
trying, with the help of the IMF, to climb out of its own selfmade economic 37  
morass onto a stable growth track. The problem with Russia, though, was that 38  
too many of its factories couldn't make anything of value. In fact, much of what 39  
they made was considered "negative value added." That is, a tractor made by 40  
a Russian factory was so bad it was actually worth more as scrap metal, or just 41  
raw iron ore, than it was as a finished, Russian-made tractor. On top of it all, 42  
those Russian factories that were making products that could be sold abroad 43  
were paying few, if any, taxes to the government, so the Kremlin was chronically 44  
short of cash. 45

Without much of an economy to rely on for revenues, the Russian government 46

had become heavily dependent on taxes from crude oil and other commodity 47  
exports to fund its operating budget. It had also become dependent on foreign 48  
borrowers, whose money Russia lured by offering ridiculous rates of interest on 49  
various Russian government-issued bonds. 50

As Russia's economy continued to slide in early 1998, the Russians had to 51  
raise the interest rate on their ruble bonds from 20 to 50 to 70 percent to keep 52  
attracting the foreigners. The hedge funds and foreign banks kept buying them, 53  
figuring that even if the Russian government couldn't pay them back, the IMF 54  
would step in, bailout Russia and the foreigners would get their money back. 55  
Some hedge funds and foreign banks not only continued to put their own money 56  
into Russia, but they went out and borrowed even more money, at 5 percent, 57  
and then bought Russian T-bills with it that paid 20 or 30 percent. As Grandma 58  
would say, "Such a deal!" But as Grandma would also say, "If it sounds too 59  
good to be true, it usually is!" 60

And it was. The Asian triggered slump in oil prices made it harder and 61  
harder for the Russian government to pay the interest and principal on its 62  
T-bills. And with the IMF under pressure to make loans to rescue Thailand, 63  
Korea and Indonesia, it resisted any proposals for putting more cash into Russia 64  
— unless the Russians first fulfilled their promises to reform their economy, 65  
starting with getting their biggest businesses and banks to pay some taxes. On 66  
August 17, 1998, the Russian economic house of cards came tumbling down, 67  
dealing the markets a double whammy: Russia both devalued and unilaterally 68  
defaulted on its government bonds, without giving any warning to its creditors 69  
or arranging any workout agreement. The hedge funds, banks and investment 70  
banks that were invested in Russia began piling up massive losses, and those 71  
that had borrowed money to magnify their bets in the Kremlin casino were 72  
threatened with bankruptcy. 73

On the face of it, the collapse of the Russian economy should not have had 74  
much impact on the global system. Russia's economy was smaller than that of 75  
the Netherlands. But the system was now more global than ever, and just as 76

crude oil prices were the transmission mechanism from Southeast Asia to Russia, 77  
the hedge funds—the huge unregulated pools of private capital that scour the 78  
globe for the best investments — were the transmission mechanism from Russia 79  
to all the other emerging markets in the world, particularly Brazil. The hedge 80  
funds and other trading firms, having racked up huge losses in Russia, some of 81  
which were magnified fifty times by using borrowed money, suddenly had to raise 82  
cash to pay back their bankers. They had to sell anything that was liquid. So 83  
they started selling assets in financially sound countries to compensate for their 84  
losses in bad ones. Brazil, for instance, which had been doing a lot of the right 85  
things in the eyes of the global markets and the IMF, suddenly saw all its stocks 86  
and bonds being sold by panicky investors. Brazil had to raise its interest rates 87  
as high as 40 percent to try to hold capital inside the country. Variations on this 88  
scenario were played out throughout the world’s emerging markets, as investors 89  
fled for safety. They cashed in their Brazilian, Korean, Egyptian, Israeli and 90  
Mexican bonds and stocks, and put the money either under their mattresses or 91  
into the safest U.S. bonds they could find. So the declines in Brazil and the 92  
other emerging markets became the transmission mechanism that triggered a 93  
herdlike stampede into U.S. Treasury bonds. This, in turn, sharply drove up 94  
the value of U.S. T-bonds, drove down the interest that the U.S. government 95  
had to offer on them to attract investors and increased the spread between U.S. 96  
T-bonds and other corporate and emerging market bonds. 97

The steep drop in the yield on U.S. Treasury bonds was then the transmission 98  
mechanism which crippled more hedge funds and investment banks. Take for 99  
instance Long-Term Capital Management, based in Greenwich, Connecticut. 100  
LTCM was the Mother of All Hedge Funds. 101

Because so many hedge funds were attracted to the marketplace in the late 102  
1980s, the field became fiercely competitive. Everyone pounced on the same 103  
opportunities. In order to make money in such a fiercely competitive world, the 104  
hedge funds had to seek ever more exotic bets with ever larger pools of cash. To 105  
guide them in placing the right bets, LTCM drew on the work of two Nobel Prize- 106

winning business economists, whose research argued that the basic volatility of 107  
stocks and bonds could be estimated from how they reacted in the past. Using 108  
computer models, and borrowing heavily from different banks, LTCM put \$120 109  
billion at risk betting on the direction that certain key bonds would take in 110  
the summer of 1998. It implicitly bet that the value of U.S. T-bonds would go 111  
down, and that the value of junk bonds and emerging market bonds would go 112  
up. LTCM's computer model, however, never anticipated something like the 113  
global contagion that would be set off in August by Russia's collapse, and, as 114  
a result, its bets turned out to be exactly wrong. When the whole investment 115  
world panicked at once and decided to rush into U.S. T-bonds, their value soared 116  
instead of fell, and the value of junk bonds and emerging market bonds collapsed 117  
instead of soared. LTCM was like a wishbone that got pulled apart from both 118  
ends. It had to be bailed out by its bankers to prevent it from engaging in a fire 119  
sale of all its stocks and bonds that could have triggered a worldwide market 120  
meltdown. 121

Now we get to my street. In early August 1998, I happened to invest in my 122  
friend's new Internet bank. The shares opened at \$14.50 a share and soared to 123  
\$27. I felt like a genius. But then Russia defaulted and set all these dominoes in 124  
motion, and my friend's stock went to \$8. Why? Because his bank held a lot of 125  
home mortgages, and with the fall of interest rates in America, triggered by the 126  
rush to buy T-bills, the markets feared that a lot of people would suddenly payoff 127  
their home mortgages early. If a lot of people paid off their home mortgages 128  
early, my friend's bank might not have the income stream that it was counting 129  
on to pay depositors. The markets were actually wrong about my friend's bank, 130  
and its stock bounced back nicely. Indeed, by early 1999 I was feeling like a 131  
genius again, as the Amazon.com Internet craze set in and drove my friend's 132  
Internet bank stock sky high, as well as other technology shares. But, once 133  
again, it wasn't long before the rest of the world crashed the party. Only this 134  
time, instead of Russia breaking down the front door, it was Brazil's turn to 135  
upset U.S. markets and even dampen (temporarily) the Internet stock boom. 136

As I watched all this play out, all I could think of was that it took nine 137  
months for the events on Asoke Street to affect my street, and it took one week 138  
for events on the Brazilian Amazon (Amazon.country) to affect Amazon.com. 139  
USA Today aptly summed up the global marketplace at the end of 1998: “The 140  
trouble spread to one continent after another like a virus,” the paper noted. 141  
“U.S. markets reacted instantaneously. . . People in barbershops actually talked 142  
about the Thai baht.” 143

It wasn't long, though, before Amazon.com started to soar again, pulling 144  
up all the Internet stocks, which in turn helped pull up the whole U.S. stock 145  
market, which in turn created a wealth effect in America, which in turn encour- 146  
aged Americans to spend beyond their savings, which in turn enabled Brazil, 147  
Thailand and other emerging markets to export their way out of their latest 148  
troubles by selling to America. Amazon.com, Amazon.country — we were all 149  
becoming one river. 150

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## Appendix B

### Works analysed

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