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ARTICLE



## Workplace issues in the context of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*: Mental health problems, cannabis and the division of labour

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### ABSTRACT

This paper examines the distinctive value of literature inside organisational theory, and how using narratives as possible future scenarios can help both academics and managers consider the consequences of mental health problems, the (mis)use of drugs, and the division of labour in the workplace. The paper adopts Aldous Huxley's novel *Brave New World* for this purpose. Another contribution of the paper is providing a model that offers managers a step-by-step action plan of how to use literary texts to study sensitive workplace issues, generating new knowledge which would ultimately help them to envision ways to act appropriately and develop future strategies.

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### Introduction

Scenario planning is used by businesses to consider a wide range of possible outcomes and to enhance organisational adaptability. In 2011, 65 percent of companies were expected to use scenario planning (Wilkinson & Kupers, 2013) since relying on trend analysis and projection is no longer enough to assure future success (Rhoads & Babor, 2018). When companies rely on defending and extending what they usually do, they start getting into trouble because management is poorly prepared for the unexpected. One approach to avoid potential calamities is to plan for low-probability, high-consequence events that might critically impact a business (Niles, 2009).

Scenarios have the power to 'engage and open the minds of decision makers so that they pay attention to novel, less comfortable, and weaker signals of change and prepare for discontinuity and surprise' (Wilkinson & Kupers, 2013). The process of thinking about a range of possible futures can draw attention to an issue that might otherwise be neglected. Examples of companies that used scenario planning to gain competitive advantage are: Royal Dutch/Shell which anticipated the drop in oil prices in 1986 (Wilkinson & Kupers, 2013), Xerox which anticipated the convergence of the copier and printer, American Express which anticipated the replacement of traveller's cheques by credit cards, and United Parcel Service which transformed itself over several years following its scenario planning in 2004 (Ogilvy, 2015). Apple provides another example of a company that uses scenario planning to keep itself flexible and to move quickly with market shifts. Dependent on computer chips in its devices, from the Mac to the iPhone, Apple keeps changing its chips partners, from Motorola, to IBM, to Intel, back to IBM, and to modifying its own based on ARM holdings' designs (Hartung, 2008). On the other hand, when companies fail to visualise a future scenario, they could go extinct, an example is the Canadian retail icon T. Eaton Co. Ltd. that 'lost sight of the importance of keeping its brand exciting' and failed to predict the right amount of stores to close and the amount of funds really needed to turn the company around (Sheppard & Chowdhury, 2005).

Ogilvy (2015) defines scenarios as 'alternate futures in which today's decisions may play out. They are stories with beginnings, middles and ends. Good scenarios have twists and turns that show how the environment might change over time.' Storytelling is, therefore, at the heart of this process of scenario planning. Those future narratives 'generate new knowledge, improve thinking about the future, and help envision ways to act appropriately'

(Rhoads & Babor, 2018). This description of scenarios (as stories with beginnings, middles and ends) is also a basic description of the nature of the genre of the novel. Instead of conducting research interviews to identify the critical driving forces for scenarios, or holding scenario-building workshops, this paper utilises a literary text as a 'ready-made' scenario.

This paper is useful to both academics and practitioners. For academics, it raises awareness with regards to the potential importance of literary texts as sources for scenario planning, demonstrating how a novel could be utilised as a possible future scenario that is capable of providing strategic foresight. Since managers and organisations constantly need to develop methods and strategies to increase their understanding of their business environment, scenario planning helps them in improving their decision-making, in dealing with uncertainty, and in overcoming overconfidence and tunnel vision (Varum & Melo, 2010). This paper helps managers probe the future in a scenario through Aldous Huxley's science-fiction novel, *Brave New World*, focussing on three influences on employee wellbeing and effectiveness: the impact of mental health problems, the (mis)use of drugs, and the division of labour on the workplace.

Managers struggle with how to effectively open dialogue around mental health and drug use with employees. Not only are mental health and drug use sensitive topics, but they are also confidential topics, which inhibits dialogue. The division of labour and resultant hierarchy also contributes to this challenge. As such it is difficult to consider the possible scenarios and how they impact both the employees and the organisation. *Brave New World* provides an in-depth scenario. It is accessible and given the story line, it draws the reader into the details. It allows the dialogue to be focussed on the novel and its characters, not specific employees and managers in an organisation. It gives voice to a topic while maintaining anonymity.

To summarise, there are two major goals of this papers: first, to encourage the use of fiction as a legitimate approach to the study of the workplace, and this is accomplished by comparing the world in which we live today and the path our countries and corporations are on to the fictional events in *Brave New World*. Secondly, by using a step-by-step action plan, to help managers pay attention to and understand sensitive, confidential, and often neglected, workplace issues that need to be considered when planning for the future of the organisation.

This paper is organised as follows. First, the link between literature (specifically the genre of the novel) and organisational theory is introduced, focussing on how science fiction could be treated as a vision of possible future(s), similar to scenario planning in business. Secondly, a literature review that covers the key developments in three different streams is presented: (1) employee mental health problems that are either caused or cured by the workplace; (2) the effect of the (mis)use of drugs (specifically legalised recreational cannabis) on both the employees and the workplace; and (3) the development of the theories of the division of labour and their impact on the workplace. Thirdly, critical theory (employed in organisational studies) is introduced as the theoretical foundation for this paper. Fourthly, the research methodology used in the paper is explained and depicted in a flowchart. Next, a short synopsis of the novel is given before analysing it to highlight the three workplace issues discussed earlier (mental health problems, effect of (mis)use of drugs, and the division of labour). Finally, a conclusion is presented.

## Literature and management

Literature is frequently an interdisciplinary tool, and the relationship between literature and ideas, or using literature as social evidence or testimony, is centuries old (Brieschke, 1990, p. 376). To date, fiction has been discussed in various ways in organisational research (Savage, Cornelissen, & Franck, 2018); this includes: (1) management education, (2) discovering research ideas, (3) understanding the notion of organisations as fictions, and (4) managerial training and inspiration. First, the heuristic role of narrative fiction is quite established in MBA and executive development programmes, for it helps students to gain a more intimate, first-person and imagined experience of organisations, for example in case study teaching and in learning exercises based on fictional personal and/or growth narratives (Philips, 1995). Secondly, reading fiction can be a rewarding starting point in understanding organisational analysis and identifying new ideas and angles for organisational research (Beer, 2016; Czarniawska-Joerges & Guillet de Monthous, 1994; Rhodes & Brown, 2005). Thirdly, Savage et al. argue that fiction is not only the opposite of reality, but it also holds real power over people, for 'they shape how people make sense of organizations and are thus rather than derivative or secondary impressions very much the *essence* of organizations' (2018, pp. 977–978). In other words, fiction is more than organisational elements of imagery,

myths, and narratives (Cetina, 1994; Hassard & Holliday, 1998); organisations hold fictional images of themselves, creating certain impressions through imagery that (in)directly corresponds to their objective reality (Savage et al., 2018, p. 977).

Lastly, as much as the narrative paradigm can considerably add to the methodical basis of organisation studies, extending it to a conversation with novelistic narratives about worlds of business and organisation may contribute a useful perspective in managerial training (Jeorges, 1994, p. 269), providing new insights. Czarniawska-Jeorges and Jeorges suggest a 'three culture'-notion, in which the science of management partakes in varying shares in (1) practical business; (2) analytic science; and (3) in its narrative aspects, or literature (1994, pp. 237–238). Narrative knowledge helps bridge the gap between theory and practice, for it produces generalisations and deep insights without claiming universality. Narrative knowledge is also able to transfer tacit knowledge without explicit writing (Czarniawska, 1999, p. 16). *Harvard Business Review* encourages its readers to 'read fiction to the bottom line' in order to find managerial wisdom (Demott, 1989). More importantly, fiction accomplishes what organisation theory often misses: combining 'the micro events with the macro systems,' or the fate of individuals tied with that of institutions (Monthoux & Czarniawska-Jeorges, 1994, p. 9). Novels also transmit '*tacit knowledge*,' describing knowledge without analysing it. Waldo emphasises that 'through literature dealing with organizations we can extend the range of our knowledge' (1968, p. 5). Since fiction is set in different times and countries, it has the power to demonstrate a wider reflection on business culture than what is usually the case in management contexts (Monthoux & Czarniawska-Jeorges, 1994, p. 10).

Czarniawska reasons that novels can become models for organisational theory, 'not for imitation, but for inspiration.' (1999, p. 78). To her, novels are relevant, valid, and acceptable versions of the world due to their aesthetic features. It is, therefore, 'the power of creative insight and not documentary precision that makes novels both a potential competitor of and a dialogue partner for organization theory' (1999, p. 79). Good novels are capable of helping managers become better by providing them with 'managerial wisdom' (Monthoux & Czarniawska-Jeorges, 1994, p. 1–2). It is possible to gain insight from novels and literary genres when teaching and researching management, for example, the subjective aspect, the organisational expertise of the writers and their experiences of organisational reality. Although a novel can be personal in tone, it can still have a reality that reflects larger truths (Monthoux & Czarniawska-Jeorges, 1994, pp. 7–8). When studying management, the literary faults or virtues are less important. The crucial question is whether there is anything that organisational studies can learn from fiction. In addition to the obvious answer (good writing), novels are a rich and often neglected source of *capta*<sup>1</sup>.

This paper, however, will deviate from the four uses of fiction in organisation studies and research discussed above. Through the analysis of a science fiction novel, this paper will show how literary narratives could be employed as possible future scenarios that can help both academics and managers. Science fiction, a distinctive genre of the novel, can be seen as a diagnosis of the present and a vision of possible futures much like scenario planning in business. As such, it provides a contemporary resource with which to examine both contemporary organising processes and organisations as institutions (Higgins, 2001, p. 4). Science fiction, especially the dystopian ones, can be seen as morality tales, a warning of possible futures in an attempt to help us avoid or rectify them. Such attempts to 'read' science fiction for a social purpose assume that 'science fiction produces evidence that can be read as critiques of contemporary society and its possible future directions' (Higgins, 2001, pp. 4–5). Thus, this paper is not designed to provide a factual account of the future of humanity, rather, it is perhaps best read as a signpost for the future of the organisation theory landscape. Following Eid (1999), the analysis in this paper will attempt to move in and 'out of the text,' making the fictional text become a source for providing interpretive insights into organisation theory.

### **Literature review: mental health, cannabis and the division of labour**

Because of the significant costs for organisations and members of the general public, there is always a need to better understand how organisations can prevent, manage, and help treat common employee mental health problems (i.e. such as short term coping with stress) and mental illnesses (i.e. a wide range of mental health problems characterised by significant distress and impaired functioning over an extended period of time) (Dimoff & Kelloway, 2019). In general, mental health conditions such as excessive responses to stress, burnout, depression, anxiety and substance abuse problems continue to create significant economic, social, and personal costs to

employees, employers and society (Dimoff & Kelloway, 2013; Joyce et al., 2016). Another issue affecting the workplace is the effect of the use and/or abuse of opioids and other substances such as cannabis. The third and last theme to be discussed in this section is the division of labour and the role it plays in organisations both regionally and globally.

It is worth mentioning that the examples and citations used in this paper are from the West (i.e. North America and Europe), and this is for two reasons: (1) most of the events in Huxley's novel are set in the 'civilized' West (in contrast to the isolated 'savage reservations'), therefore, a similar setting (i.e. Western organisations) is needed to facilitate the comparison between fiction and reality. (2) The culture and workplace culture in non-Western settings (Hofstede, 2011) is different and requires a separate study.

### ***Mental health in the workplace***

Mental health problems can be triggered by an increasingly fast-based, information and brain-based economy (Coleridge, 2013). Mental health literacy (i.e. the knowledge and understanding of mental health problems and potential treatments) is remarkably low compared to physical health literacy (Jorm, 2000). According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), in extreme cases, mental health issues can lead to discrimination and social stigma (World Health Organisation, 2013).

Despite the high prevalence of mental-health problems among the general population (one in four at some point during their lifetime), an estimated total of 70 percent of individuals do not seek help when faced with mental-health issues. Such a gap in treatment is a result of several factors: (1) lack of knowledge of the symptoms of mental illness and how to access treatment; (2) prejudicial attitudes; and (3) anticipated or real acts of discrimination against people who have mental-health problems. One of the effective interventions to battle such 'stigma' is to focus on mental illness at the workplace (Hanisch et al., 2016).

In addition to the humane argument to support optimal employee mental health, there is also a financial argument. Depression-related illnesses are costly conditions that affect business, for they impact job performance and lead to on-the-job productivity losses. Employers need to develop or implement targeted health and disease-management programmes that aim at improving the quality of health care delivered to workers, improving their day-to-day functioning, and lowering their health risks (Goetzel et al., 2004).

In Canada, 66 percent of companies with highly effective health and productivity programmes perform better than their competitors (Coleridge, 2013). Although productivity is difficult to calculate because of the lack of standard metrics, Goetzel et al. (2004) estimate that, based on average impairment and prevalence estimates from a large medical/absence database, the overall economic burden of depression and other mental illnesses in the US is \$348 per employee per year. One-third of the mental health cost burden is related to productivity losses, including unemployment, disability and lower work performance (Goetzel et al., 2018). Thus, mental-health illness is a costly condition affecting employers. In addition to heightened health care expenditures, it is related to absenteeism from work (work-loss days) and presenteeism (being less productive on a normal workday). In the UK, employers lose £33–42 billion due to absenteeism and/or presenteeism (The Lancet, 2017). Based on absenteeism and presenteeism alone, the Department of Health in London, England, estimates that comprehensive screening programmes for depression have a return on investment of approximately 4:1 (Knapp, McDaid, & Parsonage, 2011). In Canada, poor employee mental health is one of the most prevalent and costly occupational health issues (Dimoff & Kelloway, 2013).

The largest cost of workplace related disability is associated with mental health conditions, accounting for nearly 30 percent of disability claims and 70 percent of disability claims costs (Coleridge, 2013), leading to an estimated loss to the Canadian economy of approximately CAD \$50 billion annually, of which CAD \$6 billion is a direct result of productivity declines associated with poor employee mental health in Canadian organisations (Dimoff & Kelloway, 2013).

In the European Union (EU), a report studying fifteen member countries of the pre-2004 EU estimated that the annual cost of work-related stress and related mental health problems is between three and four percent of the gross national productivity, amounting to €265 billion annually (Levi, 2002). Poor employee mental health has been also associated with some less quantifiable, yet costly, human consequences such as: reduced productivity, suboptimal performance, and low job satisfaction, in addition to correlating with heightened risk for workplace

accidents, personal problems, and physical health problems (Dimoff & Kelloway, 2013), and indirect costs associated with hiring and training replacement employees (Knapp et al., 2011).

Although there is no conclusive evidence to suggest that the workplace is the sole cause of employee mental health problems, full-time employees spend more waking hours in the workplace than anywhere else (Statistics Canada, 2015). Thus, the workplace plays the dual roles of being 'the cause' and 'the cure' of employee mental health problems, regardless of whether such problems are caused in or out of the workplace (Dimoff & Kelloway, 2013).

### *The workplace as the cause of mental health problems*

The workplace can be a source of psychological ill health, leading to reductions in overall employee wellbeing. Work demands and pressures unmatched to an employee's knowledge and abilities can challenge their capacity to cope and as a result work-related stress arises (Leka, Jain, Iavicoli, & Di Tecco, 2015). Some of the factors that may impact employee mental health are psychological factors (e.g. job demands, job control, social support, organisational justice), perceived job dissatisfaction, organisational change, job insecurity, and employment status (Joyce et al., 2016, pp. 683–684). Other examples of struggle and potential stressors include: coping with globalisation and technology, multigenerational workforces, complex work-family dynamics, downsizing, contingent employment, outsourcing and increase workloads (Dimoff & Kelloway, 2013). In some cases, although the workplace may not be the direct cause of mental health problems, it might increase it. For example, the prevalence of negative attitudes towards identifying and treating mental health problems can accentuate the stigma. Discrimination from managers and/or co-workers creates significant barriers to self-care and reduces the likelihood that an employee will seek care for mental health issues (Knapp et al., 2011).

### *The workplace as the cure for mental health problems*

Despite its potential to have a negative impact on employee mental health, the workplace plays an essential role in developing and maintaining psychological health and wellbeing. In addition to fulfilling economic needs, the workplace can be a provider of individual satisfaction and accomplishment. Work also provides employees with a broader social network that helps to promote social connectedness and self-determination through work-related tasks and experiences (Dimoff & Kelloway, 2013). Thus, although employment creates mental health problems, it also provides skill satisfaction, social interaction (Auerbach & Richardson, 2005) and helps build confidence and self-esteem (Leka et al., 2015).

To combat poor employee mental health, both issues of prevention and clinical treatment have to be tackled. Mental health interventions are defined as 'any intervention that a workplace may either initiate or facilitate that aims to prevent, treat or rehabilitate a worker with a diagnosis of depression, anxiety or both' (Joyce et al., 2016). Preventative interventions can reduce the onset and recurrence of mental health problems (such as stress), by providing employees with the needed education on mental health, resources and support. In addition, organisations can invest in Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs) that provide the latter with counselling and psychotherapy services to help them cope with existing mental health symptoms. Organisations, moreover, can develop interventions that: prevent work overload, reduce role stressors such as ambiguity, improve job security, offer flexibility in work schedules, and improve leaders' knowledge of mental health (Dimoff & Kelloway, 2013).

Tackling mental health issues in the workplace should not focus on particular problems in isolation. On the contrary, it should put policies and practices in place to tackle the risk factors to mental health by appropriate interventions in addition to developing awareness and facilitating treatment (Leka et al., 2015). Because of their knowledge of workplace issues and their ability to implement adjustments to working conditions, managers are in a unique position to manage work-based mental health risk factors and improve the mental health of their employees. They can lead by example regarding acceptance and understanding in addition to influencing changes and decisions to benefit their work. Managers can implement both reactive and preventative managerial strategies (Gayed et al., 2018).

By providing managers and supervisors (i.e. workplace leaders) with mental health training programmes, they become more supportive of their employees' mental health issues. They also actively encourage employees to use available resources (Dimoff & Kelloway, 2019; The Lancet, 2017). To achieve this, managers should follow a process of resource-utilization which covers four stages: recognition, identification, resource mobilisation and evaluation (Dimoff & Kelloway, 2019, pp. 5–6). Moreover, Pignata, Boyd, Winefield, and Provis (2017) call for



implementing diverse multilevel strategies that target both the individual-organisation interface that enhances the interpersonal and social relations in the workplace, and the employees as individuals. For example, teaching protective coping strategies to individuals, introducing changes in job roles and practices, increasing recognition at the organisational level, and reducing workloads and time pressure.

### ***Cannabis, prescription and non-prescription drugs***

The legality of cannabis for medical and recreational use varies by country in terms of its possession, distribution, cultivation and consumption. So far, Uruguay and Canada are the only sovereign states that have fully legalised recreational cannabis nationwide, while in the United States, ten states and the District of Columbia have legalised the recreational use of cannabis although it remains illegal federally. The misuse and abuse of prescription and non-prescription opioids (that could lead to addiction) has also been a growing concern for employers, impacting productivity, workplace costs, absenteeism, disability costs, worker's compensation claims, and overall medical expenses (Opioids, 2019). In addition, the excessive use of drugs is linked to mental health issues whether as a cause or a result (World Health Organisation, 2017). With medicinal legalisation and the opening of the recreational market, workplace regulations regarding the consumption of cannabis (i.e. marijuana) have become more problematic. Employers now have to consider the potential adverse effects (if any) on employees' health and also methods of consumption (e.g. pills, vaping, smoking, edibles), product proliferation, as well as the short and long-term health and behavioural effects. There is a great amount of uncertainty around the impact legalising of cannabis will have on the work environment and the best way to manage its impacts. There is also a growing awareness and concern, such as addiction issues, related to the use of prescription and non-prescription drugs.

The following section of the literature review will provide an examination of the division of labour theories, both historically and how they apply to today's world of globalisation and manufacturing. Compared to the previous sections of the paper, this section is longer and more detailed, which in itself highlights the importance of examining the division of labour in *Brave New World* as the foundation of intricate themes such as mental health, addiction and discrimination.

### ***Division of labour***

The division of labour is a multifaceted concept that applies to several levels of analysis: small groups, families, households, formal organisations, societies, and even the entire 'world system' (Wallerstein, 1976). While sociologists at the micro-level are concerned with 'who does what,' macro-sociologists focus on the larger structural issues of societal functions<sup>2</sup>. The division of labour, therefore, could be considered a fundamental concept in understanding the development of modern society. A chronological list of the development of the division of labour theory is provided in [Appendix 1](#). We can trace the emergence of the systematic and intentional division of labour to prehistoric societies, especially in the ancient civilisations of China, Egypt, Greece, and Rome, where the accumulation of an agricultural surplus and the establishment of markets both created and stimulated the differentiation of producers and consumers. Another phase in the development of the division of labour was in Europe, where the 'craft guilds' that dominated from the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries declined. It was in the 18<sup>th</sup> century that seminal books of theory discussing the division of labour were published.

### ***Old division of labour***

In 1776, Adam Smith wrote *The Wealth of Nations*, a classic treatise on the economic efficiencies of a complex division of labour. He observed that the manufacture of steel pins could be more than two hundred times more productive if each separate operation (there were more than a dozen) were performed by a separate worker. Smith argued that the emerging industrial form of production entailed the erosion of artisan skills and their replacement by coordination among a large number of people carrying out specific, assigned activities. In this new system, one person could do the work of many. Productivity gains were attributable to increases in dexterity by focussing on a single function.

Following Smith's ideas was David Ricardo's basic law of *comparative advantage* which stated that commodities are valued according to the quantity of labour required for their production (Ricardo, 1932).

Ricardo challenged mercantilism, the idea that the purpose of trade was merely to accumulate gold or silver. With comparative advantage, Ricardo argued in favour of industry specialisation and free trade, suggesting that industry specialisation combined with free international trade always produces overall greater wealth.

Early sociologists such as Herbert Spencer considered the growth of societies as the primary determinant of the increased specialisation and routinisation of work. They also emphasised the positive impacts of this process. Spencer, like other functionalists, viewed human society as an organic system that has become increasingly differentiated as it grew in size. In his *Principles of Sociology* (1897), Spencer considered the evolution of human society as a process of increasing differentiation of structure and function.

Karl Marx, on the other hand, did not share Smith and Ricardo's belief in the beneficial consequences of the division of labour in manufacturing and brought a political dimension to the division of labour theory (Mittelman, 1995, p. 276). He viewed the division of labour as the 'prevalent characteristic of capitalism.' Marx contended that the division of labour is the main cause of alienation and class conflict which would eventually lead to a socialist/communist society after a revolution. Consequently, Marx and his followers called for a new form of the division of labour, supported by an equalitarian ethos, in which individuals would be free to choose their productive roles; labour would not be alienating because of the common ideology and sense of community. The classic Marxist conception of classes is often characterised as being based on *ownership*, a relation to the means of production, where society is divided into classes depending on who owns which productive resources. Within the Marxist explanation, ownership becomes the means of *exploitation*. The exploiting class is the ruling class (i.e. the State) (Polák, 2013, p. 1).

### **Sociological theory**

Between the 19th century and the second half of the 20th century, both Max Weber and Emile Durkheim raised different questions about the division of labour than the earlier debate about the costs and benefits of increased productivity (Mittelman, 1995, p. 276). Weber (1947) painted a darker picture when he documented the increasing 'rationalization' of society. He raised concerns about the ascendance of the bureaucratic division of labour with its coordinated system of roles, each highly specialised, with duties specified in writing and incumbents hired on the basis of their documented competence at specific tasks. He focussed on the social relations engendered by the division of labour, stating that 'functions may be differentiated according to the type of work, so that the product is brought to completion only by combining, simultaneously or successively, the work of a large number of persons.' (Weber, 1947). Weber, therefore, advanced the trend towards bureaucratic specialisation in all spheres of social life. He also pointed out that the 'iron cage' placed stifling limits on human freedom within the organisation, for the 'individual ... is only a single cog in an ever-moving mechanism' (Weber, 2001). Later on, Weber's followers would emphasise the division of labour by age, race, ethnicity, and gender (Cohen, 1987, pp. 231–232; Mittelman, 1995, p. 277).

Emile Durkheim's *The Division of Labour in Society* (1893) stands as the classic sociological statement of the causes and consequences of the historical shift from *mechanical solidarity* to *organic solidarity*. The former is found in smaller, less-advanced societies where families and villages are mostly self-sufficient, independent, and united by similarities. The latter is found in larger, urbanised societies where specialisation creates interdependence among social units. To Durkheim, modern organic societies rest on the complementarity of different specialised functions; such cohesive tendencies (also referred to as organic solidarity) in the division of labour further social integration and develops morality (Durkheim, 1964, pp. 396–410, Mittelman, 1995, p. 277).

Although the above classical schools allowed for the state to be the guarantor of the division of labour in a laissez-faire economy, democratic or liberal forms of state were not deemed necessary. Moreover, the spatial dimensions of the division of labour (for example, the constraints that some cultures place on the mobility of labour) were only discussed much later (Mittelman, 1995, p. 277).

### **The new international division of labour**

One cannot discuss the development of the division of labour without mentioning the revolutionary ideas of Henry Ford at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Ford's moving assembly lines began to produce the frames for Model T automobiles in 1913, at a rate of about one every two working days, but within months, refinements on



the assembly process improved this to four units per day. This eightfold increase in efficiency was accompanied by a decrease in the price of the cars and indirectly stimulated a very large industry (Mittelman, 1995, p. 278).

After the contributions by both Weber and Durkheim, the theory of the division of labour would remain dormant until the 1960s when the world market expanded (Mittelman, 1995, p. 278). Pushed by the need for competition and the fear of extinction, firms and enterprises expanded and produced on a scale wider than the national market (Mittelman, 1995, p. 292).

The division of labour is treated as a key element in Peter Blau's book, *Inequality and Heterogeneity* (1977). This important work emphasises the primacy of differentiation (division of labour) as an influence on mobility, prejudice, conflict, affiliation, intermarriage, and inequality. In Blau's scheme, a society may be undifferentiated (all persons or positions are independent, self-sufficient, etc.) or strongly differentiated (a high degree of specialisation and interdependence). Blau, like Durkheim, distinguished two major types of division of labour: routinisation (the subdivision of work into repetitive routines) and expert specialisation (the subdivision of work into expert specialities). Blau has shown that the division of labour always increases inequality in the organisation, and while social or geographic mobility can increase integration within the organisation, the degree of linguistic, ethnic, or cultural heterogeneity can inhibit integration. Blau (1977, p. 214) notes that:

Advances in the division of labour tend to be accompanied by decreases in various forms of inequality but by increases in inequality in power. Although the advancing division of labour does not generate the growing concentration of power, the two are likely to occur together, because the expansion of work organizations promotes both.

Fröbel, Heinrichs, and Kreye (1980) explained how transnational corporations have established a global manufacturing system based on labour-intensive export platforms in low-wage areas, hence a decline in manufacturing in the West and Japan relative to gross domestic product and the industrialisation in the developing world to maximise profits under conditions of heightened global competition. Globalisation has impacted the division of labour. The following section explains how.

### ***The global division of labour***

***Regionalism and globalism.*** Nowadays, domestic political economies are penetrated by global phenomena. The state plays an important role in the distribution and reorganisation of production, for example, in Singapore, the government has played a key role in the country's free market economy. Zone-based strategies of managing globalisation are expanding. To gain access to external capital and create jobs, some countries have adopted export-processing zones (EPZ). Others adopt a strategy of 'twinning,' a type of coordination and linkage between sub-regions to become regional hubs for concentrations of direct foreign investment, such as Singapore and Hong Kong. Another concept is a 'growth triangle' comprised of three nodes that motivate transnational corporations to consider the region for investment. For example, Johor in peninsular Malaysia (offering land and semi-skilled labour), the Riau Islands of Indonesia (offering land and low-cost labour), and Singapore (providing high quality human capital and a developed economic infrastructure) (Mittelman, 1995, pp. 279–281).

Globalisation has become one of the main topics of social science research, public debate, and politics (Münch, 2016, p. 1). Münch explains that one of the characteristics of the emerging global order is its being 'a dynamic process of global labour division along the tracks constructed in symbolic struggles about the moral and legal construction of the global order' (2016, p. 6). Building on the works of Durkheim (the development of modern labour division) and complementing it with Weber's thesis (the removal of separating in-group and out-group morality in modern capitalism), Münch argues that solidarity and morality change in the wake of globalisation (2016, p. 7). In the framework of the increasing global labour division, a transnational organic solidarity superimposes itself on the mechanical, organic solidarity of nation states (2016, p. 14). Not all members and regions of a nation benefit from the advantages of global labour division to the same extent, and some have to accept losses as opposed to the past (for example, workers in the Western states are displaced by a cheaper workforce from the developing, newly industrialised, countries in the system of global labour division) (2016, p. 152). Despite the general rise in benefits (referenced to by classical and neo-classical economics), this is accompanied by painful social transformations (2016, p. 153). As a result of the shrinking distances (population growth and density of transport and communication), people are compelled to move beyond the national context and to find advantage in the global context by way of specialisation (2016, p. 156). There is also growing inequality within countries resulting from participation in global labour division (2016, pp. 157–158).

**Inter-regional and intra-regional migration.** The influx of migrants forms a distinctive territorial division of labour (Mittelman, 1995, p. 283). With this new labour supply, new linkages have emerged, such as smuggling networks and international gangs, for example, between the U.S. and Mexico. Consequently, an illegal market for low-cost labour has emerged in the receiving countries, while in smaller towns and villages of the sending countries, migration has had a profound negative impact, tearing apart the social fabric, separating families, and inserting new polarities between those who can and those who cannot purchase a variety of consumer goods (Mittelman, 1995, pp. 285–286). Max Frisch, the Swiss author and playwright, said of the receiving countries, ‘We asked for workers, but human beings came’ (qtd. in Mittelman, 1995, p. 285)<sup>3</sup>. Mental health, drugs and the division of labour and globalisation are three influences that can deeply and profoundly impact employee and organisational effectiveness. Now that the three key themes of *Brave New World* have been contextualised into the modern working environment, we will advance to the theoretical foundation of this paper.

### Theoretical foundation: critical theory

Critical theory is an interdisciplinary approach whose chief goals are: to unite theory and practice, to consider the state of things and how they could operate differently, as well as to promote social change and human potential free from constraints. Critical theory offers a critique of social conditions in an attempt to help us envision a better society in which humans are able to ‘achieve subsistence, self-determination, and autonomy ... knowledge that enhances the possibility of freedom’ (Murray & Ozanne, 1991, p. 132). Burton (2001) writes that instead of scientific, foundational approaches to human nature, critical theory

favours interpretive approaches to human behaviour which need to be contextualised in time and space to avoid the ethnocentrism by which all other cultures are viewed and judged by one’s own. A significant task of critical theory is to simultaneously critique contemporary society while envisioning new possibilities (p. 726).

The significance and central goal of critical theory in organisational studies is to ‘create societies and workplaces which are free from domination, where all members have an equal opportunity to contribute to the production of systems which meet human needs and lead to the progressive development of all’ (Alvesson & Deetz, 1999, p. 192). Critical theory also helps in exposing situations of domination, disempowerment, and undemocratic practices associated with corporate culture in the management of organisations (Ogbor, 2001, p. 591). Similarly, critical theory helps expose situations of domination, disempowerment, and undemocratic practices associated with corporate (replaced by the ‘State’ in the novel) culture in the management of organisations (Ogbor, 2001, p. 591).

Rather than seeing corporate culture as conflict-reducing glue that provides harmony and liberation to members of the organisation, it can also be seen as a tool for repression, domination and the hegemonic perpetuation of an elitist group within organisations and society at large (Ogbor, 2001, p. 597). Thus, stripped of critical perspective, corporate culture lends a dignified complexion to managerial control and a whole-hearted acceptance of the means through which employees in an organisation are repressed (Ogbor, 2001, p. 591). Moreover, through corporate culture, members of the organisation abdicate their ontological identity, whether religious, family or other source of identification, to that sanctioned by the corporation (Ogbor, 2001, p. 599).

When the object of criticism (the status quo, the corporate culture) is able to offer to the masses what it has presented as the only alternative, both organisationally and socially, the need for denial and criticism appears to be unnecessary (Ogbor, 2001, p. 604). Marcuse suggests that ‘comfortable, smooth, reasonable, democratic unfreedom prevails in advanced industrial civilization,’ where ‘independence of thought, autonomy, and the right to political opposition are being deprived of their basic critical function in a society which seems increasingly capable of satisfying the needs of the individuals in the way in which it is organized.’ (1964, p. 1). Thus, to Marcuse, the loss of freedom in the so-called democratic societies could be attributed to something other than force, it could be the result of a systematic shaping of the human psyche that leads to a voluntarily giving up of freedom.

The main goal of critical theory is man’s emancipation from slavery; to attain such an ideal of emancipation, first, an autonomous critic has to escape the ideologies and false consciousness of a particular society and call for a more enlightened form of practice. Secondly, citizens must employ free dialogue (i.e. ‘philosophy of language’) to investigate ideas, beliefs and statements utilising opportunities that are understood to be inherent in language (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992). According to Deetz (1992), companies and management practices shape

and promote needs, wishes, beliefs and identities of workers, customers as well as citizens, while advertisements and other consumer marketing create and reinforce gender stereotypes, and foster materialistic and egotistic lifestyles. The next section describes the methodology, the guideline for managers, used in this paper.

## Methodology

Organisations have learnt that scenario planning is indispensable when it comes to avoiding unplanned problematic events, developing future plans, strategies, and/or decisions, and assessing how managers and/or employees should respond in different future situations. Unfortunately, scenario planning requires time and resources, and the more sensitive the needed data is (e.g. asking employees about their personal experiences of sexual harassment, suicide, mental health, drugs, etc.), the more difficult it is to collect it. Literary texts, therefore, become an excellent source of scenarios: (1) they can help organisations in creating dialogue on these difficult subjects; (2) they are ready-made; (3) and they do not require a substantial budget. Huxley's *Brave New World* is an excellent example of such a scenario. The methodology utilised in this paper involves reading the novel and pulling applicable and inciteful material from it to show how the novel provides insight, as a scenario, into the themes of mental health, drugs and division of labour. First, however, we need to briefly consider the relationship between the reader and the novel.

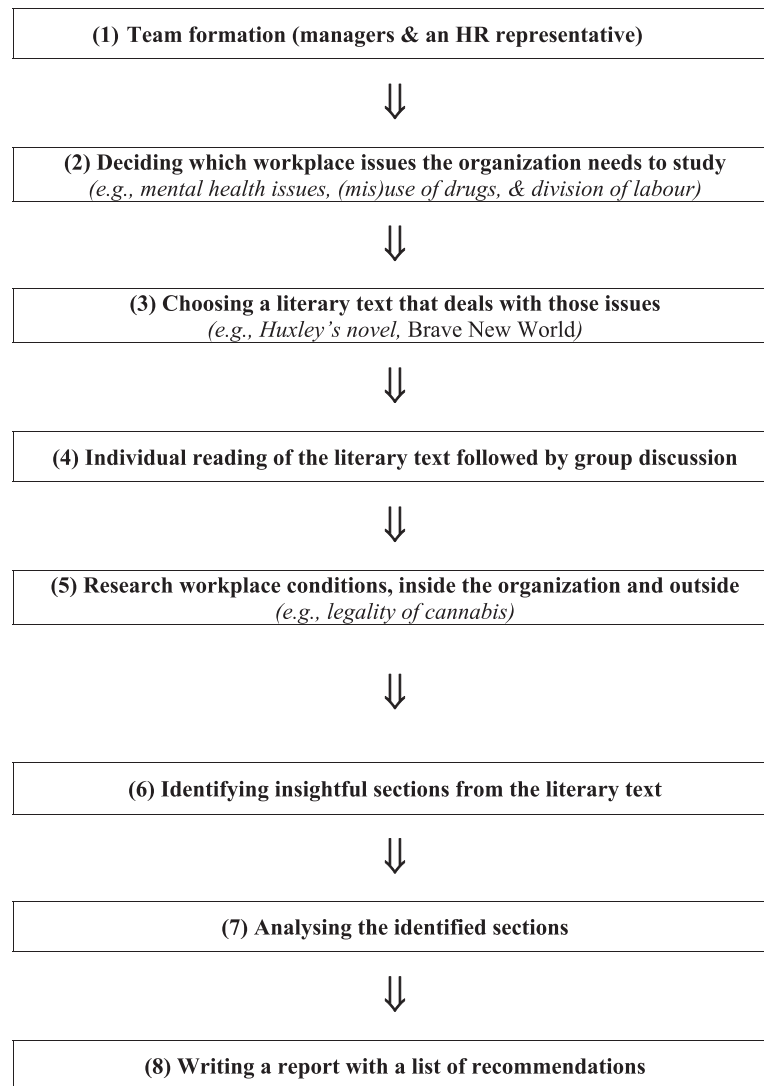
Czarniawska argues that an organisational researcher is more of a literary critic than a novelist, for first, a described organisation is, in a sense, a product of the researcher's mind, and secondly, organisations are originally discussed and evaluated by organisational actors (1994, p. 325). Theorists of interpretation explain the divergence between readings that arises from the socially situated nature of any reading, thus, the constructions of the novel's content is affected by the reader's gender, historical context, and purpose(s) for reading (DeVault, 1990). Some argue that literary works should be treated as 'aesthetic expressions' rather than as representational texts, because the representations are partial, selective, and constructed (Burns & Burns, 1973; Routh & Wolff, 1977). Although we should be wary of mistaking fiction for information, some fictional accounts do help the readers in making sense of the world, using 'fictional portrayals as a basis for their own assertions about society' (DeVault, 1990, p. 888). Huxley's *Brave New World*, examined below, provides one such example.

The first author of this paper first read *Brave New World* nearly a decade ago, and while teaching the text to undergraduate students of English literature she delved into the text from a critical and literary perspective. Nearly a decade later, and when she decided to work on the theme of workplace conditions, she revisited Huxley's text, this time, looking at it from a different viewpoint: a managerial perspective that links the novel to workplace conditions in organisations, specifically the division of labour. When Canada legalised the recreational use of cannabis on 17 October 2018 (the medicinal use was legalised nationwide on 30 July 2001), two more themes were added to this research: mental health problems and the effect of drug use in the workplace. One of the major themes in Huxley's novel is the role played by the 'soma' drug in maintaining the stability of the system. After an extensive research of managerial academic journal articles, the first author identified quotations and sections from the book that would explain the themes discussed in this paper, treating them as secondary data. This was followed by an analysis of the data using a critical theory approach. Finally, a first draft of the paper was developed together with the second author of this paper. Those steps leading to the writing of this paper have also become the foundation of an action plan.

To further explain how literary texts can be successfully utilised by organisations for scenario planning, a step-by-step action plan that managers can use follows. It is worth highlighting that the purpose of this action plan is not to provide managers with alternative paths of action, it is rather to help them consider and pay attention to a wide range of possible outcomes (that stem from current, and usually avoided, sensitive topics). And it is the understanding of those possible future scenarios that would ultimately help them to envision ways to develop future plans and strategies.

## Action plan for managers

To study sensitive workplace issues using literary texts as a possible future scenario(s), the steps as outlined in Figure 1 below are to be followed. Examples, based on this paper, are added to the model in italics. (1) A team of managers and an HR representative (who is aware of company policies and ethical protocols and is



**Figure 1.** A model that managers can follow when using literary texts to study sensitive workplace issues.

in direct contact with employees and is aware of their problems) is to be formed. (2) The team then decides which workplace issue(s) the organisation needs to study. (3) The team chooses a literary text, such as a novel, that discusses those issues. (4) Each members of the team reads the literary text on his/her own before discussing it together in at least one session. (5) The team researches the chosen workplace topics inside the organisation and outside (i.e. laws and regulations related to each issue). (6) The team identifies insightful sections. (7) The team analyses the chosen extracts. (8) Lastly, the team writes a report with recommendations on workplace conditions and how best to improve them. The remaining sections of this paper are dedicated to provide an example of steps six and seven, showing how a critical reading of *Brave New World* can shed light on sensitive workplace issues.

## Discussion

### *The story*

The inclusion of a text summary is a distinctive feature that separates sociological and managerial analysis from literary analysis. On the one hand, the literary convention assumes that readers have read the primary text being discussed, especially if that text is part of a shared canon. On the other hand, a scholarly article in the sociological and managerial domain does not require reading the primary text. It is also convention that the authors will provide a summary of the text and display data on which the analysis is based (DeVault, 1990, p. 892). It is

worth highlighting that since every summary is a selective interpretation of events/characters, our account will be subjective.

First published in 1932, Huxley's *Brave New World* dramatises a nightmare vision of the future based on the anxiety of the world in the 1920s and 1930s (Haney II, 2009, p. 137). Huxley sets his world in the year A.F. 632 (632 years after Ford created the Model T) in which human beings are mass-produced like clones, and Fordism, modern consumerism, genetic engineering and behavioural conditioning are mixed (Beilharz & Ellem, 2009, p. 17). Overseen by ten regionally based World Controllers, the World State (i.e. the government sector in *Brave New World* that administers the entire planet, with a few isolated exceptions) delivers 'Community, Identity, Stability' and controls the people by educational and pharmaceutical means. Instead of brute force, science is used to maintain social order by managing the 'problem of happiness.' Citizens are tailored to meet society's requirements. Operating on the basis of a genetic caste system, and conditioned to love their social status, citizens are identified by what they wear: (1) Epsilons (genetically manipulated to be stupid) wear black; (2) low-skilled workers, Deltas, wear khaki; (3) hard-working, semi-skilled Gammas wear green; and, at the top of the caste hierarchy, (4) the skilled workers, Betas, wear mulberry; and (5) the intellectual upper-caste, Alphas, wear grey. To accept their status in life, people are constantly conditioned by 'soma,' an anti-depressive drug freely available. Huxley's world is globally integrated thanks to travel, and the remaining human beings who are not produced in factories live in barbed wire-enclosed reservations and are called 'savages.' Untouched by Ford's legacy, the savage Reservation in New Mexico becomes a symbol of exotic primitivism that could be visited. However, this is not a romanticised escape from the World State, for although there is love, family, domesticity, and motherhood in the Reservation, there is also an abundance of hatred, ostracism, punishment, loneliness and alcoholism. The Reservation becomes the opposite extreme and not a way out. As for the rare troublesome, overly intelligent individuals, isolation zones in Iceland are the answer to the threat they pose to the established social order. Other themes found in the novel include: science, sex, power, suffering, literature and writing, freedom and confinement, isolation, drugs and alcohol, identity, spirituality, society and class, and dissatisfaction. A list of the main characters that are mentioned in the analysis below is provided in [Appendix 2](#).

### ***Huxley's world through the lens of critical theory***

When reading the novel through the lens of managerial critical theory, it becomes clear why Huxley's fictional world can be representative of the real world of organisations. Three main themes come into focus: corporate culture, emancipation, and management practices. First, as mentioned earlier, critical theory helps expose domination and power in corporate culture. When we view the state in Huxley's novel as a replacement of organisations, the state culture becomes a discursive practice that legitimates the leaders' claim to power. This view of (corporate) culture is the backbone of society in *Brave New World*, where 'Everybody belongs to everyone else' (2013, p. 103), where genetic engineering ensured the disappearance of the family unit, and where God was replaced by Ford's doctrine. Because corporate culture is constituted by the ideologies of the dominant group in society, it rarely attends to the voices of the non-dominant groups (Ogbor, 2001, p. 602). In addition, in Huxley's State, the citizens are 'happy' to forgo their independence, high culture, and individual identities for the sake of stability, safety, physical gratification, and a false sense of contentment. Those in power in Huxley's world succeed in achieving what critical social scientists warn about: the elites' capabilities to 'further oppress the oppressed' (Nord & Jermier, 1992, p. 203)<sup>4</sup>.

Secondly, critical theory calls for an emancipation of slavery by escaping society's false ideologies and employing free dialogue, yet both means of emancipation fail in *Brave New World*, for the State proves to be a much stronger opponent when compared to characters such as Bernard Marx and John the Savage. Bernard is a would-be rebel whose dissatisfaction with society is expressed in sullen resentment and imagined, and never fulfilled, heroism. He rejects the values of his world when he turns aside Lenina's advances, and boldly calls the Deltas to rebellion and to throwing out their rations of soma. Although he finally faces Mustapha Mond (the most powerful and intelligent supporter of the World State), he ends up exiled in Iceland. John, on the other hand, appears to be the solution needed to change this world, yet in reality, he is held back by his own destructive tendencies towards violence and self-loathing. Although he keeps repeating how much he despises conditioning, he himself has been conditioned in a way, associating sex with humiliation and pain, and character with suffering. And it is this unplanned conditioning that holds him back from acting bravely and pushes him to take his own life. As for employing free dialogue as a means of fighting



domination, from the very beginning, the choice has been made: 'You've got to choose between happiness and what people used to call high art. We've sacrificed the high art' (Huxley, 2013, p. 188). Lastly, all the management practices employed by companies to shape and promote the needs, wishes, beliefs, stereotypes, lifestyle and identities of its workers and customers are reflected in *Brave New World* where people are compared to 'Nice, tame animals' (p. 18); the State has the power to resist any and all unstabilizing forces.

Following the model discussed earlier, the three chosen workplace issues (step three) are: mental health problems, (mis)use of cannabis and other drugs, and the division of labour. The following sections exemplify step seven in which identified extracts from the novel are analysed to shed light on those issues, proving that when contextualised, literary texts can be representative of workplace issues and are valuable when it comes to scenario planning.

### **Mental issues**

Despite the propaganda and the constant psychological and physical conditioning, not everyone in the new world is happy. Three of the employees in the World State provide examples of how catastrophic the results of mental health issues could be. The first example is Bernard who, despite his elevated work position (reflected in his high social caste), feels 'miserably isolated' (p. 73); his isolation in the workplace originally stems from him looking physically different than his colleagues; he looks more like someone from a lower caste.

[Bernard] does not feel himself too secure in his superiority. To have dealings with members of the lower castes was always, for Bernard, a most distressing experience ... Bernard's physique was hardly better than average Gamma ... Contact with members of the lower castes always reminded him painfully of this physical inadequacy ... his self-consciousness was acute and distressing ... he felt humiliated. Would the creature treat him with the respect due to his caste? ... The mockery made him feel an outsider; and feeling an outsider he behaved like one, which increased the prejudice against him and intensified the contempt and hostility aroused by his physical defects. Which in turn increased his sense of being alien and alone. A chronic fear of being slighted made him avoid his equals, made him stand, where his inferiors were concerned, self-consciously on his dignity ... he envied men ... who never had to shout at an Epsilon to get an order obeyed; men who took their position for granted; men who moved through the caste system as a fish through the water. (p. 56)

Despite his insecurities and the psychological effects of being slighted by his colleagues and subordinates, Bernard desperately tries to fit in by shifting the others' focus to John the Savage (the latest anomaly in the new world), and he succeeds momentarily. For the first time in his life, Bernard is treated like a normal person 'of outstanding importance ... But behind his back people shook their heads' (pp. 132–133). At the end, Bernard is exiled to an island in Iceland together with 'All the people who, for one reason or another, have got too self-consciously individual to fit into community-life. All the people who aren't satisfied with orthodoxy, who've got independent ideas of their own. Everyone, in a word, who's anyone' (p. 193). Thus, by failing to address his mental health issues (his depression and isolation in the workplace), the workplace ends up losing a talented employee.

The second example is Helmholtz Watson whose depression stems not from physical inferiority like Bernard, but from mental superiority:

A mental excess had produced in Helmholtz Watson effects very similar ... Too little bone and brawn had isolated Bernard from his fellow men, and the sense of his apartness, being, by all the current standards, a mental excess, became in its turn a cause of wider separation ... grown aware of his mental excess, Helmholtz Watson had also become aware of his difference from the people who surrounded him ... Mental excess could produce, for its own purposes, the voluntary blindness and deafness of deliberate solitude, the artificial impotence of asceticism. (pp. 58–59)

Once again, and as a result of failing to address his unfilled feelings and restlessness in the workplace, Helmholtz is ultimately exiled to the Falklands Islands. Unlike Bernard, this relocation proves to be beneficial to his mental health, as he views it as an inspiration in his writing. This, however, does not change the fact that by not addressing his work-related stress, another talented employee is lost. In other words, in most cases, every exiled individual (i.e. terminated employee) means that the workplace has lost one of its unique human assets.

The third example, John the Savage, is a character who suffers from being 'Alone, always alone ... shut ... out of absolutely everything' (p. 117). John has suffered from depression from the very beginning, from when he was still in the Reservation and even more when he moves to the brave new world in which he becomes an exotic 'delicious creature' (p. 130). Eventually, this leads him to try crucifying himself under the hot sun, because he wants to experience what it was like being crucified and, more importantly, because he is 'unhappy' (p. 118).

Living in a remote hermitage, spending hours on his knees praying, and hitting himself with a whip does not help John. Followed by reporters and treated like an oddity or a speaking ape, John ends up hanging himself. John is, therefore, an extreme example of the outcomes of acute mental health problems.

As with the differing groups in *Brave New World* (Gammas, Deltas and Epsilons, the lower castes, and Alphas and Betas, the higher ranking castes), nowadays, workplaces are home to employees of different ethnic and racial backgrounds, and when there is prejudice towards their differences, employees can display symptoms of excessive stress, depression and anxiety which ultimately leads to high levels of psychological strain. Not being able to fit in their work environment, being excluded from social support within the workplace, and suffering from the prevalence of negative attitudes towards mental health issues make it harder to ask for help. *Brave New World* provides us with three possible scenarios of the outcomes of disregarding employees' mental health problems, none of which is good for individuals or businesses.

### ***The (mis)use of drugs in the workplace***

In Huxley's fictional new world, the only answer to behavioural and mental health issues is the routine use of prescription drugs. To bring about a "love of servitude," people need 'a substitute for alcohol and the other narcotics, something at once less harmful and more pleasure-giving than gin or heroin' (p. 230). Thus, 'soma,' a commercially produced drug, becomes the perfect 'Euphoric, narcotic, pleasantly hallucinatory' drug, for 'One cubic centimetre cures ten gloomy sentiments ... [and] a gramme is better than a damn.' (p. 48). Soma has '(a)ll the advantages of Christianity and alcohol; none of their defects' and that makes you '(t)ake a holiday from reality whenever you like, and come back without so much as a headache or a mythology' (p. 47).

In today's world the recent increase in the legalisation of recreational drugs (i.e. cannabis) in different countries has created conflicting arguments to the benefits and dangers they pose in the workplace. In *Brave New World*, the consumption of drugs becomes the norm on which life is founded, and when taken away, life irrevocably collapses. For example, Linda, who was deprived of soma during the years spent in the Reservation, would totally depend on her soma dosages once she gets back to her 'brave new world.' However, this cycle of deprivation and dependence would end up with her getting senile and losing her connection with the real world until she dies at the age of forty-four, suffering and terrified despite all the soma given to her. Two other characters refuse to take soma: Bernard who prefers to be himself ('Myself and nasty. Not somebody else, however jolly.' (p. 77)) and John who refuses to take soma, imploring the others to do the same and not to be enslaved by the addiction, 'Don't take that horrible stuff. It's poison, it's poison ... Poison to soul as well as body.' (p. 180). In this brave new world, total reliance on drugs proves to be irrevocable, and those who do not conform to consuming it, end up being ostracised and eventually the workplace loses them. The issue of drugs in the novel mirrors themes around happiness and drugs found in the workplace today

### ***The reservation, the state, and the division of labour***

If Huxley's world state and his grotesque London is a dystopian realisation of the future, then the division of labour in the novel could be considered an interpretive insight into the future of the division of labour. In *Brave New World*, 'the secret of happiness and virtue—[is] liking what you've got to do. All conditioning aims at that: making people like their unescapable social destiny' (2013, p. 16). Huxley, therefore, debated that for the government to solve the problem of making people love their servitude, it has 'to standardize the human product and so to facilitate the task of managers' (p. 230). Thus the people/workers' lives resemble that of 'cattle led from one green pasture of eating pleasure to another and another until they are slaughtered (or ... allowed to die in the Hospital for the Dying) and offered up for the good of all' (Myron, 2008, p. 11)

Marx had warned that the capitalist division of labour is the source of alienation and class conflict in society. To avoid such an outcome, Marx said individuals have to be free to choose their productive roles. Huxley, however, proved that such an outcome could be changed if the labourers (and not the array of choices given to them) are changed. Genetic engineering, indoctrination, and conditioning help produce labourers who are happy with whatever task they are assigned. On the other hand, within the Marxist explanation of exploitation, Huxley's work agrees with Marx's assumption that the ruling class (i.e. the State) is also the exploiting class which ideologically legitimises their relationship in the eyes of the exploited (i.e. the labourers).

When it comes to Durkheim's theories, *Brave New World* (and specifically when comparing the World State to the Reservation in the novel) is a further proof that the urbanisation and modernisation of society increases the division of labour. Yet instead of individuals united by pre-existing similarities (either coincidentally or voluntarily), the organic solidarity in Huxley's test-tube world is forced and guaranteed by the State and their genetic and psychological manipulation of the citizens. Huxley's novel is a manifestation of Durkheim's debate that global labour division brings national societies closer to each other by weakening their collective consciousness and cultural traditions. In *Brave New World*, most of the planet (excluding a few isolated savage reservations) is united as the World State, governed by ten World Controllers headquartered in key cities. In Huxley's world, genes (and not occupational differentiation or routinisation) is what distinguishes the division of labour. Following Blau's theory of the division of labour in organisations, such a division increases the inequality of power in Huxley's state.

In our modern world, the sense of globalisation is a key dynamic (Beilharz & Ellem, 2009, p. 26). Huxley's *Brave New World* could be read as a clear example of the future of the current global division of labour where transnational organic solidarity superimposes itself on organic solidarity of the nation states, and where shrinking physical distances is accompanied by social transformations, and growing inequalities within nations (which Huxley portrayed in the conflict between the State and the Reservations). In today's world, there is an increasing fear of (im)migrants. Such a fear is magnified in Huxley's dystopian world where people are distinguished by being called 'citizens' or 'savages.' Even those citizens exposed to the outside savage world are mistrusted and ridiculed when they try to come back. For example, after spending years in the Reservation, Linda is no longer accepted back in London, for both her physical appearance (old and ugly) and mannerism resemble those of the savages. Like many of today's immigrants, Linda is isolated and ridiculed by the other citizens. She can only find peace when given an overdose of soma.

In his Immigration Speech in Phoenix, American President Donald Trump said: 'It's our right as a sovereign nation to choose immigrants that we think are the likeliest to thrive and flourish and love us' (Garcia, 2016). This declaration came after Trump repeatedly defended his presidential promise to build a wall on the US-Mexico border. Similarly, in Huxley's world,

the frontier ... separated civilization from savagery. Uphill and down, across the deserts of salt or sand, through forests, into the violet depth of canyons, over crag and peak and table topped mesa, the fence marched on and on, irresistibly the straight line, the geometrical symbol of triumphant human purpose. And at its foot, here and there, a mosaic of white bones, a still unrotted carcase dark on the tawny ground marked the place where deer or steer, puma or porcupine or coyote, or the greedy turkey buzzards drawn down by the whiff of carrion and fulminated as though by a poetic justice had come too close to the destroying wires. (2013, pp. 89–90)

Yet erecting the fence as a line of defence in Huxley's world is only half the answer to the immigration problem, for those who tried to cross the fence had to be dealt with: 'savages ... got enough experience of gas bombs to know that they mustn't play any tricks' (2013, p. 90). To today's readers, such visions of a darker future are no longer unrealistic. They are simply likely visions of an imminent future.

## Conclusion

Huxley's novel portrays an illusion of an ideal civilisation whose members are shaped by genetic engineering and behavioural conditioning and their happiness is maintained by government-sanctioned drugs and consumption. In his Foreword to *Brave New World*, Huxley wrote that 'a book about the future can interest us only if its prophecies look as though they might conceivably come true' (Huxley, 2013, p. 225). In Huxley's vision, the concern about utopia is not how to foster its realisation, but how bringing it about may succeed in bringing about a nightmare instead. Central to this fear is the global nature of such a dystopia (Beilharz & Ellem, 2009, p. 17). Yet there will always be a gap between fiction and reality, and as a fictional writer, Huxley will always be permitted much greater prerogative and creative licence than a theorist. It will be, therefore, erroneous to read *Brave New World*, or any other fictional text, as some kind of 'blueprint' (Higgins, 2001) for the future. Despite all concerns, the main value in reading fiction must always be considered in terms of inspiration and creativity, especially in application to the organisation, and not just verifiability or scientific credibility (Fitchett, 2002, p. 320; Ritzer, 2005).

In *Brave New World*, humans are more akin to cyborgs or robots through a globalised technology. In today's world, the stress on global competition results in the growing uniformity of local desires and spaces

of consumption. Everybody claims authenticity, which then becomes a uniform script (Spierings & Van Houtum, 2008, p. 906). Such globalisation implies an inexhaustible resource of change in local consumption spaces, creating continuous opportunities to transform our personal identities as well as our urban environments (Spierings & Van Houtum, 2008, p. 899). Huxley's novel warns readers against commodifying totalities including communism and fascism, standardisation and mass production, and to defend individual rights and freedoms. However we are living in a new mass individualised urban society; individuals in our current era of mass individualisation (where personal freedom is the new god) are not empowered (Spierings & Van Houtum, 2008, pp. 906–907).

The novel exposes asymmetrical power relations which calls attention to today's corporate culture that has become an instrument for the universalisation of managerial interests, the suppression of conflicting interests, and the perpetuation of corporate and societal hegemony (Ogbor, 2001, p. 591). Instead of emancipating labourers in both the workplace and society, the future World State in *Brave New World* ostracises the Other (i.e. the savages, the less privileged groups) and manipulates the citizens. In the novel, the Controller describes his world saying:

The world's stable now. People are happy; they get what they want, and they never want what they can't get. They're well off; they're safe; they're never ill; they're not afraid of death; they're blissfully ignorant of passion and old age; they're plagued with no mothers or fathers; they've got no wives, or children, or lovers to feel strongly about; they're conditioned that they practically can't help behaving as they ought to behave. And if anything should go wrong, there's *soma*. Which you go and chuck out of the window in the name of liberty, Mr. Savage. *Liberty!* (2013, p. 187)

The two goals of this paper are to compare the world we live in today and the path our countries and corporations are on to the fictional events in *Brave New World*, and to help managers pay attention to and address less comfortable, and sometimes often neglected, sensitive workplace issues that need to be considered when planning for the future. Huxley's *Brave New World* provides a series of in-depth scenarios of sensitive topics and situations that are usually kept confidential, allowing the focus to shift from an organisation's employees and managers to fictional characters. Whether they are multinational corporations or local organisations with employees from different ethnic backgrounds, businesses need to end the discrimination associated with the division of labour, to evolve their cultures, and to support their employees by normalising and reducing the stigma of mental health issues and drug dependency. *Brave New World* may be a work of fiction, but it is definitely a vision of possible future scenarios.

At the outset of this paper, we stated that our goal was to show how using fiction as a possible future scenario can help organisations generate new knowledge and pay attention to possible outcomes of sensitive workplace topics, hence, a more in-depth understanding that would affect the planning for the future of the organisation. We have also argued for the benefits of encouraging the use of fiction as a legitimate approach to the study of the workplace. In approaching this task, we explored Huxley's *Brave New World*, focussing on some of its work-related themes. We reason that treating a fictional text as a scenario can provide a useful addition to our ways of thinking about organisations and an indispensable approach to overcome the trepidations surrounding sensitive workplace topics while maintaining anonymity. It is, therefore, our hope that this paper will contribute to broadening the space for studying workplace issues within organisation studies.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Notes

1. Boahene and Ditsa (2003, p. 18) define data as "the starting point in our mental processing . . . [the] invariances about an object or a phenomenon that could be paid attention to." On the other hand, *capta* are "the result of selecting some for attention."
2. The "world system" as described by Wallerstein (1976) is the upper limit of the analysis of the division of labour. Entire societies are characterized as "core" or "periphery" in Wallerstein's analysis of the global implications of post-industrialism.
3. Perhaps the most neglected factor in the division of labour theory is the impact of culture (Mittelman, 1995, p. 286; Munck, 1988).
4. Other reasons why the elites may use Critical Social Science are: 1) to enlighten members of the elite groups; 2) to help any oppressed group; and 3) to be used in struggles with other elites outside their group (Nord & Jermier, 1992).

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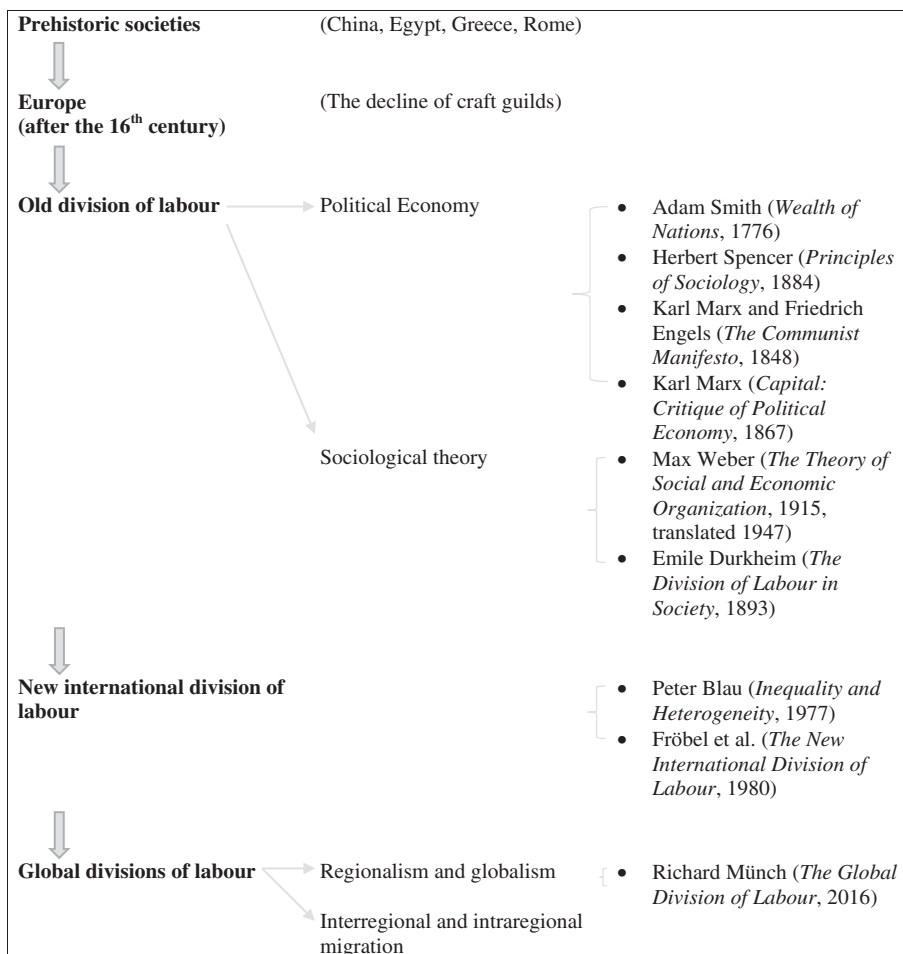
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## Appendix 1



The development of the division of labour theory as discussed in the literature review.

## Appendix 2

John the Savage	The protagonist of the novel and its ultimate outsider, for not only has he been born by natural birth, he represents rebellious thought. When confronted with this brave world, John is appalled by the mechanical control of the people and the division of classes. During his discussions with World Controller Mustapha Mond, John talks about the price of happiness: the sacrifice of freedom, individual expression, beauty, and truth. Although Mond acknowledges the flaws in his world, he believes that the loss of freedom and individuality is beneficial because it enhances social stability and conformity. Tragically, John belongs to neither the Reservation (where his mother Linda, a former inhabitant of the new world, prostitutes herself) nor the new world. In an attempt to repent for his ways, John retreats to the lighthouse, and ends up committing suicide.
Bernard Marx	Named after Karl Marx, he lashes out at his society because it proves hostile to him. His eccentricities are attributed to the fact that 'somebody made a mistake when he was still in the bottle—thought he was a Gamma and put alcohol into his blood surrogate' (2013, p. 46). His weirdness is seen in his dislike for Obstacle Gold, preferring to spend his time 'alone,' and disliking how the society views Lenina (one of his female co-workers) as a piece of 'meat' to be shared by everybody.
Homholtz Watson	He is one of the few characters who understand their shortcomings, consequently, when punished by exile, he sees it as an opportunity to pursue his interests freely without the interference of the nation state.
Lenina Crowne	A vaccination worker at the Central London Hatchery and Conditioning Centre. Her only moment of defiance is exclusively dating one man (Bernard Marx) for several months.
Linda	A Beta who gets lost in the Reservation where she gives birth to John. Once back in the World State, she spends her last days living on soma.

The main characters in *Brave New World*.