The "hetero-ethical" management development rationale

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Abstract

Purpose – Lees's "ten faces" description of organizational rationales for investing in management development reflected a personal assessment which was not grounded in empirical data. Although frequently discussed and cited since, no critique of the model, or discussion of the ethics of organizational investment in management development, has been offered. The purpose of this paper is to explore the impact of the rationale of a management development programme, particularly on programme participants.

Design/methodology/approach – An ethnographic approach was utilized in the collection of data on reactions to the rationale for deploying a spiritual management development initiative in a large Irish services organization.

Findings – The research conducted on the programme found the programme's rationale to be "hetero-ethical" in that it suggested multiple possible outcomes for participants which they were encouraged to identify and pursue on an individual level.

Research limitations/implications – The implications of this for participants and organizations are considered.

Originality/value – The concept of the hetero-ethical rationale for management development, and its implications, are discussed and potential avenues for further research are identified. This concept differs from previous ones in that it considers how rationales for management are received and appreciated by participants.

Keywords Ireland, Services industry, Management development, Workplace, Ethics, Rationales, Hetero-ethicality, Workplace spirituality, Spiritual management development

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

At a conceptual level, management development has been variously interpreted by training and human resource development functions in organizations and specialist providers outside the organization (Storey, 1989; Wexley and Baldwin, 1986). Rather than being "one thing," management development is "a meta-field that emerged from a range of disciplines (primarily, though not exclusively psychology, social science, and management studies), which either attempts to frame the reality of management or reframe the reality experienced by managers, with the aim of contributing to the personal resource base of managers and/or the intellectual capital of organizations" (Cullen and Turnbull, 2005, p. 336).

Recent reviews of the management development (hereafter MD) literature (Garavan *et al.*, 1999; Paauwe and Williams, 2001; Cullen and Turnbull, 2005; O'Connor *et al.*, 2006) draw attention to an enduring lacuna in understanding why organizations make often substantial investments in the development of their managers. It also highlights a need for deeper research into these rationales from a more inductive perspective which

might reveal some important "clues" to the relationship between MD and the social and cultural setting in which learning occurs.

In 1992, Lees introduced the "ten faces" model to explain the reasons why organizations chose to invest in MD. This model reflected a personal assessment of how organizations justified their investment in MD and was not based on empirical research. Although the model was frequently discussed since it was first presented, no critique of it has been offered (Paauwe and Williams, 2001), and Winterton and Winterton (1997) found that most organizational rationales for investing in MD remained an "act of faith." Lees was at pains to highlight this shortcoming with his 1992 model: it is based solely on organizational assumptions of what MD is, and what it is for. His typology is based on managerial rationales for investing in MD. Such perspectives run the risk of being evaluated solely on the terms of the MD provider, and not the culture in which participating managers actually work (Cullen and Turnbull, 2005) with the result that the claims of promises of such programs become no more than senior management fantasies (Fox, 1997). This paper to conduct a deeper analysis of the impact of an organization's explicitly stated rationale for investing in MD by analyzing ethnographic data collected over a three-year period on an MD program as it was being rolled out in a large Irish services organization. In doing so it attempts to highlight the importance of rationales when choosing and evaluating an organizational MD program.

This paper then, is concerned with clarifying, interpreting and articulating the rationale which the organization studied in our case study had for investing in a particular MD program; but also with understanding what participating managers did to this rationale. It investigates this in a single organizational locale by examining: how the organization's chief executive officer (CEO) articulated his rationale for investing in the SMD learning initiative; how the organization's HRD function communicated and promoted the initiative, and; how participating managers responded to this rationale.

2. Rationales for investing in management learning
2.1 Lees ten faces of MD
Lees's (1992) list of rationales (which he referred to as "faces") for why organizations invest in MD includes: the "functional-performance" face which aims to improve the performance of organizations by improving the performance of individual managers; the "agricultural" face which aims to internally cultivate improved management learning; the "functional-defensive" face which aims to develop knowledge and learning within mature organizations; the "socialization" face which aims to socialize managers into the organization's culture and ethos; the "political reinforcement" face which aims to extend and support existing power relations within the organization; the "organizational-inheritance" face which regulates rites of management succession; "the 'environmental legitimacy' face which establishes congruence with the myths of the organization's operating environment"; the "compensation" face which offers recompense to managers for the hardships they endure for the organization; the "psychic defense" face which protects the organization from the possibly negative effects of "agricultural" MD, and; the "ceremonial face" which provides rituals and ceremonies for managers to mark their journey through the organization. These "faces" are broadly summarized here as "resource-based strategies" or as "tools of ideological control." The former refers to approaches that develop managers in order that they might contribute to organizational strategic attainment, and the latter to

determining and ordering appropriate managerial behavior in line with the offered political order of the organization.

Lees's framework for organizing rationales is primarily descriptive, in that it attempts to represent rationales as they are articulated by senior managers. Below, we attempt an ethnographic analysis with the aim of understanding how these rationales are appreciated, internalized and resisted at all managerial levels throughout an organization.

2.2 Researching an organization's rationale for investing in MD

One of the authors spent approximately three years (from 2005 to 2008) conducting ethnographic research on the deployment of an MD program in a large Irish organization (which is pseudonymously referred to as DSB). Although the purpose of the research was not solely to investigate the rationale for the organization's investment in an MD program, it emerged as a key consideration for how the program was interpreted and articulated. Almost 60percent of DSB's managers participated in the MD initiative, and one of the authors participated, at the invitation of the organization, in a workshop session.

The program bore many similarities to the form of MD described by Bell and Taylor as "spiritual MD" which "encourages managers to pursue personal spiritual growth as a means of enhancing the meaning they derive from their work and improving their effectiveness" (Bell and Taylor, 2004, p. 440). Such self-focussed MD initiatives extend "beyond the realm of the immediate job to broader issues of career and life goals and interpersonal relations" (Guillén and Ibarra, 2010, p. 3). Participants in SMD programs are often "presented with a variety of tools and techniques which focus on the past and current experiences, both inside and outside work, but also on clarifying what it is they would *really* like to achieve in the future" (Cullen, 2008, p. 292).

The program was delivered to groups of between four and 12 managers over two-day periods. In keeping with SMD practice where "beliefs are multifarious and drawn from a wide variety of religious and psychological, as well as literary, musical and artistic, traditions" (Bell and Taylor, 2004, p. 452), the content of the program was highly participative, using media, music, role playing and personal assessment sessions in an attempt to develop self-awareness by unearthing the values, goals and priorities of individual managers. These exercises were interwoven with activities, which attempted to develop a focus on time management, emotion at work, proactive thinking, negotiation and conflict resolution and communication skills. With an explicit focus on collaborative problem solving and personal growth through the development of constructive problem solving, the overall character of the program emphasized collaborative, constructive character building (McGee, 2005).

Some 50 managers in the organization were interviewed prior to, during and following their participation in the workshop series which communicated and discussed the key principles of the SMD text and program. Miles and Huberman's (1994) approach to coding and categorizing data were utilized. With the aim of producing a rigorous analysis of how the organization's rationale is understood from integrated, differentiated and fragmented perspectives (Martin, 1992, 2002) a reflexive analysis, as described by Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000) was attempted. The discussion of the organization's rationale for investing in the SMD program is outlined below. First the stated organizational rationale, as articulated by the CEO and the Human Resource Development team are explored. These are followed with a

discussion of how managers who participated in the SMD program responded to this articulation of the rationale.

2.3 The organization's MD rationale: the gift
Early in the study, a "gatekeeper" who was a member of the organization's HRD team was questioned about the rationale for investing in the MD program. The manager replied that the CEO felt that it was "like a gift" to employees which would provide benefits at both a personal and professional level. There appears to be no direct correlation with this and Lees's (1992) rationales for organizational investment in MD. Superficially it might appear that it fits closest with the "socialization" rationale, which aims to align managers' viewpoints and objectives (in this case with the chief executives), and with the "compensation" rationale which counteracts the imperfections of organizational life through the creation of learning organizations.

The chief executive later elaborated on his rationale for investing in the MD program thus:

> I'm a big, big advocate of leading indicators. And the leading indicator here is the self. And if you can get the self piece sorted and people are happy, contented and fulfilled in themselves, then they're gonna be in a much better position then to apply, eh, those discretionary benefits to the working environment.

The CEO's desire for managers who are "happy, contented and fulfilled in themselves" echoes (Daniel, 2010).

The HRD function's internal marketing of the program continuously emphasized its qualities as a "gift" for managers. The stated organizational rationale for the program promised effectiveness at the level of the self, with a view to ensuring that the organization in turn benefits from it. The CEO stated that experiences of the program were generally reported to him as being well received, and even if it was not entirely internalized, portions of it were utilized depending on the individual:

> So I would, I would personally, encourage people to look at it, to go into it, to select and to internalize and customize in a way that works for you. And don't feel that in buying the book that you have to buy all the baggage. You know, all the em, em, wrapping paper.

The CEO then, had invested in an MD offering which did not require the managerial subjects who participate in it to completely adhere to the principles being communicated. In providing an intervention which proposes multiple methods for accessing various forms of effective selfhood, it also suggests no one single rationale for undertaking it. Instead, the program transferred the rationale-creation activity to those who participated in it. The CEO's comment that participants could choose to "internalize and customize" the program indicates that the program, similar to other spiritual MD initiatives, "places responsibility for implementing this new organizational order almost exclusively on the individual" (Bell and Taylor, 2004, p. 462).

The rationale for the program effectively requests that participants interpret the rationale and make sense of it for themselves in the light of a turbulent global market by drawing on internal emotional, psychological and spiritual resources. Its materials for analysis are those which are deeply personal (personal histories, childhood memories, aspirations and even beliefs about an afterlife). It is suggested then that program's rationale is hetero-ethical in how it attempts to use the totality of the individual's consciousness in order to become a resource to an organization facing an uncertain future in an increasingly turbulent global economy. The concept of the

hetero-ethical rationale for investing in MD is explored more in the discussion section towards the end of this paper.

This leads to the question of exactly what did managers do to and with this rationale, and how it impacted on the outcomes of the program.

2.4 Responses and resistance to the MD rationale
When asked about their general feelings about the SMD program, several of the managers interviewed commented on the expense of the program. In getting managers to focus on their personal roles and goals the organization risked losing staff whose decision to "become effective" involved leaving DSB, especially as staff attrition was a problem for the organization at that time.

It is important that the staff attrition be understood in the context of the Irish national labor market over the course of the study. Between 1998 and 2005, employment in the finance and business services sector in Ireland increased by 66 percent (Gunnigle *et al.*, 2006). This growth created opportunities for greater career mobility and many younger employees took this opportunity to move to similar organizations. Although several of the younger interviewees expressed satisfaction with the quality of their experience working in DSB, many pointed out that rates of pay were not as competitive as other employers in the sector.

The opposite held true for older, longer-serving managers. Similar to the employees in Kunda's (2006) "Tech" and Casey's (1995, 1999) "Hephaestus" some of these managers who considered their future with the organization spoke of wearing "golden handcuffs" (p. 257); attractive benefits and salaries which made it difficult for managers with dependents to consider leaving as this would risk losing the "shelter" of an organizational career:

> We're very well paid in DSB. I have a company car as well. You could say we're kind of trapped (Manager 1).

As opposed to the younger less well-paid employees who adopted a utilitarian approach to the SMD program, and acted upon it, the older managers who considered leaving aspired to developing small businesses which aligned with their personal creative or academic interests. In the absence of a utilitarian rationale for developing one's career, a more expressive individualist (Heelas, 1996) sense of selfhood manifests. Heelas explains this self-hood thus:

> […] the *expressive individualist* differs in that he or she supposes that there is much more to being a person than simply satisfying those wants which one *happens* to have, in particular those triggered by the capitalistic emphasis on wealth creation and materialistic consumption. Expressivists live their lives in terms of what they take to be a much richer and authenticated account of what it is to be human. They are intent on discovering and cultivating their "true" nature (1996, p. 156).

Lips-Wiersma (2002) found that, irregardless of the faith traditions in which individual workers participate, that they "believe four purposes to be significant and meaningful: 'developing and becoming self', 'unity with others', 'expressing self', and 'serving others'."

The CEO, however, was conscious of the fact that a side effect of the program might be to encourage some of the individuals it impacted on the most to leave the organization, despite the fact that it had cost the organization so much in financial terms:

> Interviewer: What if the gift results in people who have taken this on board, and really allowed it in, what will happen if they decide they want..?

CEO: […] To move on? That's ok, that's absolutely ok[…]. So it's the deal, it's the deal.
If you will hitch your wagon to our star at least for a while then we will undertake to[…], and
then the next bit is the bit that I always forget the verbatim, but the essence is that we will
develop you, we will prepare you, we will enrich, we will invest in you. So there's the deal.
You know, hitch your wagon to our star at least for a while and then we will do all these
things. And then if you do that, you are creating the kind of environment in which people
want to work

They won't go, but some will go and it's right that they will go. They might come back. They
might tell other people that this is not a bad place to go, and so on. But it's going to happen
and there's some people you can't keep because, eh, you haven't got what they need or they're
bigger than you are, you know. And they need to go somewhere else. Or they might go, they
might go walkabout and then they might say, "Hey, I want to come back". That's ok.

The CEO's perspective on staff remuneration and retention appeared to project the
organization's espousal of the self-work ethic (Heelas, 2002) and the concept of "gift"
was continually repeated. In some cases the gift was welcomed and valued as such, but
more often participating managers had difficulties with the concept. This was most
pronounced with regards to the cost of the MD initiative:

Manager 1: If the organization does this it will be a huge gift to the organization and I think
that everyone who goes through it will be a better person as a result of going through it.
When we look at it in the context of "are you doing other things?" – and I look at it in my area.
So, for example, I have a group of people who are saying "Can we have a performance bonus
system in [named department]?" And I say "We're not doing that, and we're not doing it
because of budget this year". Sometimes giving away these gifts can be seen as[…] It's just a
watch-out, to be fair [ ]. It's not a medicine. If we can do it, we should do it.

Gabriel (2008) has pointed out that individuals in organizations are uncovering new
forms of resistance to managerial ideologies which mirror the ways in which
individuals resist and disrupt consumerism. The resistance to the program on the
grounds of cost is salient in the Irish context for two reasons, and Daniel (2010) has
called for greater consideration of national culture in the study of workplace
spirituality and team development. First, the Irish business media continue to lionize
Ryanair and its leadership more than any other Irish organization. Ryanair have very
successfully communicated that the reason for its significant growth resulted from its
almost exclusive focus on cost cutting.

Second, over the timeframe of the research significant fears were expressed in the
media about Ireland losing its national competitiveness on the grounds of it having
become a high-cost economy. Thus, to focus on cost as a point of resistance is to utilize
a powerful verification from a larger truth game.

The managers who felt strongest about cost issues in relation to the MD program,
did not express difficulties with the people-centred, soft culture which existed at DSB.
The MD program was utilized by individuals to voice their concerns about how
DSB chose to provide personal development opportunities to staff in lieu of bonuses
and remuneration. Rather than solely being a financial manager's practical response to
an expensive MD program with no clear deliverable, the reaction to the expense of the
program appeared to manifest across departments and not just those expressly
concerned with financial matters.

The MD program had a strong focus on allowing individuals to find and create their
own rationale for participating and engaging with it. The program appeared to have
allowed individual managers an opportunity to voice their concerns about DSB's soft

culture and low levels of remuneration, which could not otherwise have been voiced due to the strictures on non-confrontation which had been put in place to maintain the "nice," "family" culture of the organization.

One manager who developed a strong attachment to the program opined that: "Sometimes, sometimes, you get some individuals, a very small proportion, that come on courses like this – this is just my opinion, to maybe voice their grievances about other things[…]. Also because we've been through so much change in this organization that people are resisting a little bit." Gabriel (1999) and Contu (2008) have asserted that the introduction of new forms of control on worker interiority have effected radical reductions in worker resistance which require more innovative forms of resistance which can take place outside a totalizing organizational gaze. Despite the constructive nature of the MD initiative, it may be that it provided some participants with an opportunity to voice their concerns about other elements of the organization's culture.

3. Discussion: interpreting the hetero-ethical gift rationale
3.1 Developing the malleable manager
Costea et al.'s (2008) exploration of the emergence of the concept of soft capitalism, as it emerged from the work of Thrift (1997), Ray and Sayer (1999) and Heelas (2002), found it to derive from an assumption that greater organizational achievement emanates from "the expansion and intensification of demands on the self to become ever more involved in work with its whole subjectivity" (Costea et al., 2008, p. 672). Soft capitalism encourages speed, self-work and a "malleable" self which can adapt to rapidly changing market conditions which involves "the gradual unfolding of an attempt to engineer new kinds of 'fast' subject positions which can cope with the disciplines or permanent emergency" (Thrift, 2005, p. 131). The MD program aimed to meet all the rationales of a company seeking to dive into a liminoid space where the employees' sense of self-hood is constantly challenged and encouraged to change (Carlone, 2006) and embrace competition, and requires a workforce willing to perform instantaneous changes in subject positions to address the rapidly emerging challenges which their new direction requires.

3.2 The hetero-ethical rationale for investing in MD
By hetero-ethical rationale we mean one which attempts to encapsulate a fluid range of rationales which program participants must seek out, rationalize and apply to their personal requirements, and align these in turn, with organizational needs. Burgoyne (2002) describes how approaches to workplace learning seek to produce various forms of self. In contrast, hetero-ethical MD programs mean that participants must work to internalize the need to generate these same rationales. The hetero-ethical rationale is rooted in the concept of soft capitalism which "refers to the rhetoric of new cultures of work and organizations, claiming self-motivation, self-actualization and emotions of belonging and sharing as the motivation for enhancing productivity and commitment to the organization" (Heikkenen, 2004, p. 492). Thrift's (2005) discussion of the emergence of soft capitalism mentions how "gurus" from the tradition of SMD contributed to a new discourse of "self-awareness," necessary to facilitate new forms of organizational relationships needed to facilitate economic restructuring.

The stated "gift" rationale for the program asserted that through participation managers would find an authentic sense of selfhood. In stating that such a project was possible, the pressure to develop the rationale for the program was transferred to the managers themselves, where the organisation's needs for a high degree of workforce

flexibility was required to match the requirement of businesses operating a neo-liberalism milieu for flexible accumulation. Harvey (2005) describes how neoliberalism has emerged from a core free-market economic doctrine into a larger set of doctrines and beliefs relating to social policy and international relations. Neoliberalism has thus evolved into a set of "articles of faith" of how best to govern, behave or conceive of one's identity and work ethic.

The success of instilling this hetero-ethical rationale in managers is supported by the pervasive and explicitly modern notion of expressivism (Heelas, 1996). The hegemonic articles of economic faith at this stage of late modernity involve a marriage a foundational beliefs which simultaneously state that the best form of society in which to live and work is one in which "free" markets are prioritized over state intervention, and in which the individual should seek out an "expressive individualist" (Heelas, 1996) mode of living which permits them to participate as a flexible actor in a rapidly morphing environment. Spiritual MD, in particular, may be a fertile research site for exploring how spiritual logic of expressivism has merged with the economic doctrine of neoliberalism.

The hetero-ethical MD rationale demands that participating managers turn-inwards to align their search for a valid selfhood with the needs of the organization or with economic forces beyond their control. Rather than attempting to create a specific "genre" of selfhood through the transfer of skills or competencies (Burgoyne, 2002) it requires managers to seek out and find these rationales themselves; to uncover how they need to change in line with organizational needs; to develop themselves in order to be a better resource to the organization while at the same time deepening how they accomplish the organization's dominant ideological underpinning; to find ways to happily disassociate themselves from their work, if they are unable to make these connections themselves. Rather, SMD risks becoming a technology for developing a particular form of selfhood which emerges from the articles of faith of neoliberalism.

3.3 Avenues for further research and suggestions for practice

If the expressive hetero-ethic is common to more of the forms of management and organizational development which emerged from the humanistic psychology movement (Bell and Taylor, 2004) there is a broader question of how it is manifested in other aspects of these activities such as performance appraisal systems, leadership development programs, organizational development initiatives, HRD activities, etc. Are such programs truly developmental tools which seek to permit managers to uncover real strengths and allow them to practice new skills in their work contexts, or do they seek to develop a hetero-ethical expressivist work ethic that overcomes issues of employee rights, and transfers the responsibility for change away from the organization? The development of deeper understandings of rationales for investing in MD activities represents an important opportunity for researchers in the field of management learning as it can help uncover tacit local socio-cultural phenomena which unintentionally influence the outcomes of MD programs in unintended ways.

Furthermore, engaging in conversations (Cunliffe, 2002) about the "innocence" of such rationales at the commencement of management learning interventions offers clear opportunities for establishing frameworks for reflexive practice among the managers who undergo these inventions, and the educators and consultants who deliver them. Doing so will provide a valuable opportunity for assisting facilitators to

understand the local organizational cultural context in which such initiatives are being deployed. It will also subvert "banking" (Freire, 1972) approaches to learning, and replace them with processes which encourage the development of , what Raelin (2007) calls, "cooperative inquirers [who] search for their own patterns of knowing while continually examining their practices" (p. 511).

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