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Getting out of mechanical management: lessons from Chinese thought

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Abstract

Most management models draw on a mechanical view of organizational action, in which outcomes are given a prominent role, at the detriment of persons. These are generally viewed as instruments serving action and its objectives. As a result work is increasingly losing sense for a number of employees whatever their hierarchical position. Ill-being at work is developing to the extent than managing so-called 'psychosocial risks' has become a new branch of human resource management. Simultaneously meaninglessness hinders creativity at work and beyond, performance. Mechanical management is thus detrimental to both individuals and organizations - hence there is an urgent need to address this question.

The objective of this paper is to explore new ways of thinking by which management could avoid the ineluctable consequences of mechanical management. This is an analytical paper which draws upon a variety of contributions in management, psychology and philosophy. In the first Part I will recall the process through which mechanical management is detrimental to both organizational members and organizations, as well as present some proposals by work psychologists to loosen the knot by which mechanical management, which is supposed to be beneficial to organizations and individuals, is actually detrimental to them. Although psychologists open up fertile paths to renew management, their responses only address some aspects of the problem and may fail to change organizational practices in depth. I believe management needs to be questioned both more globally and more deeply.

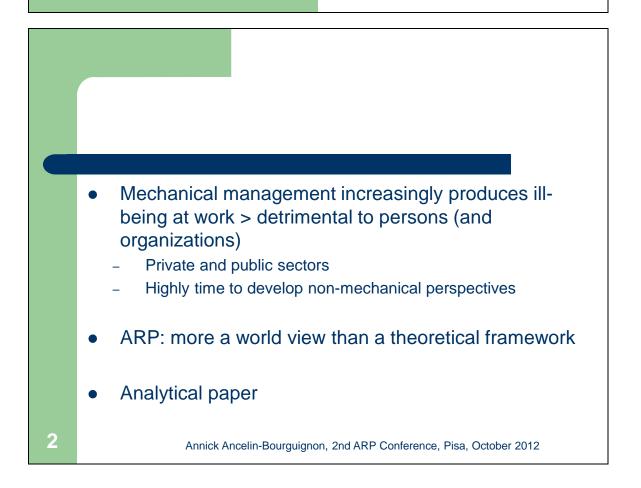
To this end, I will turn out to philosophy to show, in the second Part, that mechanical management is a direct expression of Ancient Greece thought, which can be considered as the matrix of conceptions of action, world and time that have inspired all Western thoughts and realizations since then - and in particular, management. To break with mechanical management, Part Three will then offer views on Chinese thought - which provides radically different perspectives on action, time and the world and thus can open up innovative paths for thinking new forms of management. The conclusion will discuss the contribution, limits and academic implications of this analysis.

Keywords: Management models; mechanical management; Western thought; Chinese thought.

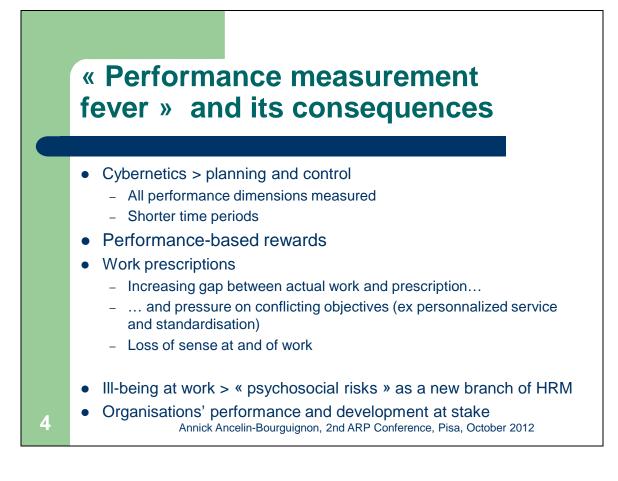
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	• Structure
	 Mechanical management: why it is detrimental and some (marginal) proposals
	 Mechanical management: a direct expression of Ancient Greece thought
	3. Chinese thought and alternative perspectives for management
	 François Jullien's work – French philosopher and sinologist
	 Chinese thought enables us to think what is « unthought » in the West (Greek inspired)
	 Early texts and language (how language frames thought)
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Mechanical management and its blind points

Mechanical management does not address

- Complexity and paradoxes, and particularly
- Psychological complexity
- Mechanical management
 - Reifies persons and the social world
 - Outcome (production) first, persons as means (human « resources »)
 - Creates complexity (psychosocial risks)
 - Puts executives' responsibility at stake ethically, legally, economically
- All sectors business, health, police, education,
 - research Annick Ancelin-Bourguignon, 2nd ARP Conference, Pisa, October 2012

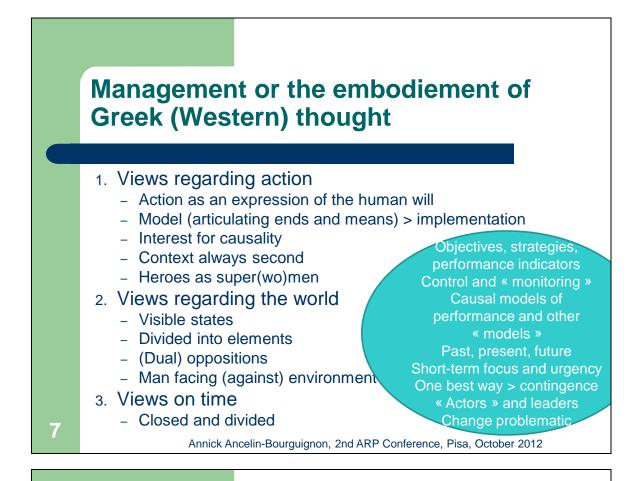


- Work: prescribed, actual, realized (outcome), experienced
- Outcome cannot be delivered without getting beyond prescription > personal creativity
 - « One's own work » > source of well-being and health
- There is a (very unfair) gap between actual and realized work
 - Activity is highly constrained by others' activities (Clot)
 - « It is impossible to evaluate [actual] work objectively » (Dejours)
- > Work evaluation
 - Judgment of beauty (peers) and judgment of utility (not performance hierarchy or customers) (Dejours)
- Spaces/moments for peers' debate about work (Clot)
 - > Maintains occupational communities > sense at work
 - Management should not attempt to collect « best practices »
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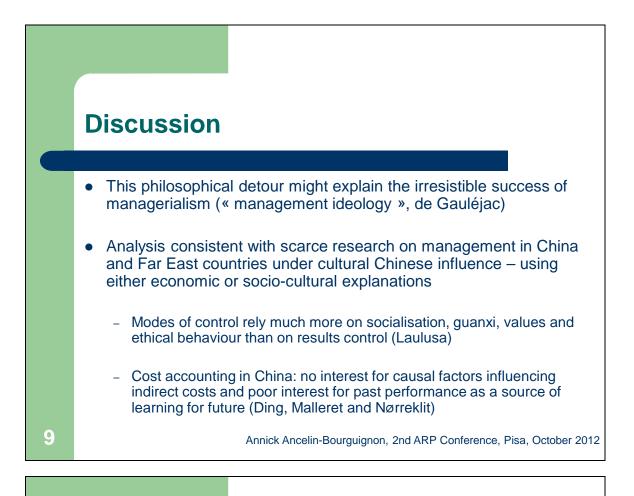
Partial

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- Pay attention to (mostly invisible) dynamics
 Variation rates are not enough
- Stop measuring everything
- Give up « excellence » for « doing one's best »
- Think performance obliquely
 - Allow time and gratuity

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- Place people first, outcome second
- Think AND instead of OR should enable considering
 - Paradoxes, ambivalence and unconscious at work
 - « Psychological rationality » (Bourguignon and Jenkins)
 - AND social structures and systems
- Value ordinary heroes and stop glorifying leaders
- MANAGE COMPLEXITY and RESTORE WELL-BEING AT WORK



