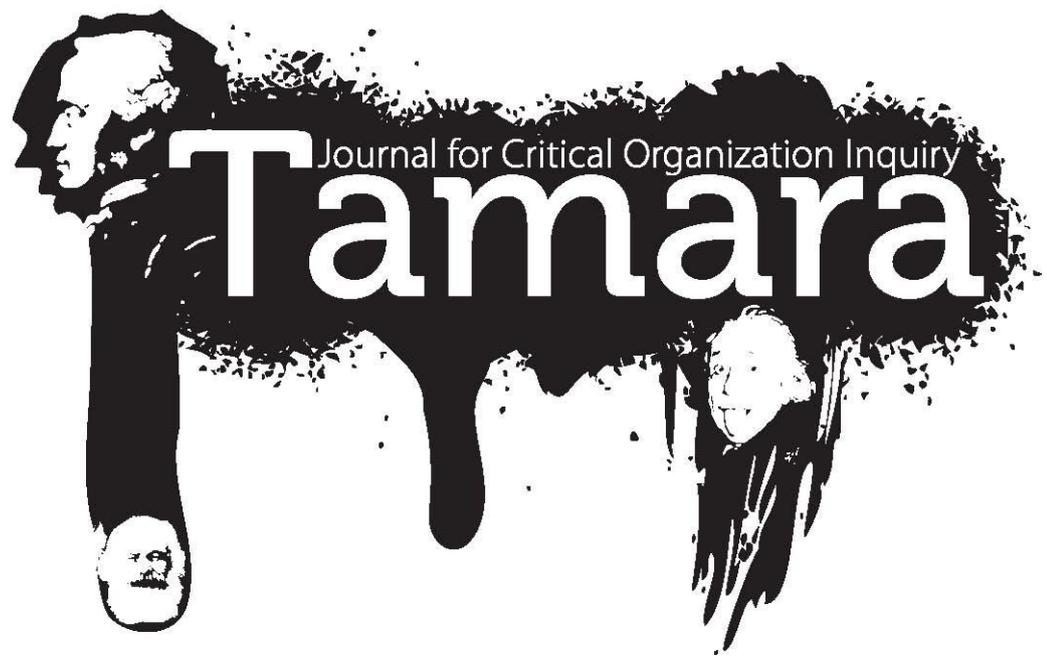


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Making Managers: Towards an Understanding of how Textbooks, Lectures and Management Case Studies Interact to Inculcate Linguistic and Managerial Habitus in Undergraduate Business Students

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Abstract

Habitus, whether it is labeled as such or as managerial/organizational socialization or culture, acts as the principle means of control among white collar professional workers within organizations. Others have argued that the principle task of the business school curriculum is to instill *anticipatory socialization* of trans-organizational regimes in traditional age undergraduate students. This paper takes a Bourdieusian perspective on both the issues of governmentality and the inculcation of appropriate habitus in traditional age undergraduates, and examines in particular how that part of the undergraduate curriculum that consists of textbooks, lectures and management case studies focus on one particular element of this general managerial habitus, specifically, the inculcation of a new linguistic habitus that both shapes how these proto-managers both speak about and begin to view the world.

Prelude

This essay represents the musings and sense making of a self-identifying cultural anthropologist (post-graduate degrees in both anthropology and organizational studies), who has spent most of his career as faculty in undergraduate management departments in the United States. It is an attempt to apply the theoretical perspective (Practice Theory a la Bourdieu) that I bring to my formal research to understand the underlying processes of my own and my colleagues classroom practices.

White Collar Labor Processes and Organizational Control¹

The analysis presented here must be understood in the larger context of the "agency problem" (Berle and Means, 1932) within the organizational theory of managerial capitalism. In particular, with the issues of control of white collar, managerial and professional labor processes within capitalist organizations. Briefly, Berle and Means point to the paradox that in systems of managerial capitalism, the supervisory and control functions normally reserved to the capitalist in early forms of capitalism, are, under managerial capitalism, delegated to certain categories of employees. Thus, derives what they call the "agency problem", that is, how does one ensure that these employees act as agents for capital, and in the capitalist's interest, rather than acting in their own self interests, even though they are in effective control of the means of production?

Main stream, managerialist organization theorists (see Barnard, 1938; March and Simon, 1958; and Cyert and March, 1963) have argued that the control of the behavior of white collar, managerial and professional workers can be explained through the interaction of (primarily economic) rewards and incentives, and the "zone of indifference" - that range of demands that the organization can make on the individual that fall within what that individual feels they are being compensated for. However, writers from radical and post-modern perspectives have pointed out the role that ideology, both within and surrounding the organization, plays in "self controlling" behavior (Johnson and Gill, 1993) and Foucaultian "governmentality" in relationship to organizational controls (Townley, 1994). Broadly put, the critical/post-modern perspective is that various discursive and disciplinary devices are utilized in and around organizations so that individuals internalize world views that both lead them to be self-controlling and to act in the interest of their employers without the need for those employers to utilize overt control devices or systems.

Elsewhere, I have discussed the role that the state, through its institution of public education, begins the process of ideological indoctrination required by capitalist organizations (Ehrensals, 2001), drawing on the radical critique of education literature (for example, Bowles and Gintis, 1968). Here, I will argue that undergraduate business education continues this process of "anticipatory socialization" (Smith, 1994), both through its overt and covert curricula. And, in Bourdieusian terms, function to instill managerial habitus in their students through their pedagogic actions.

Business School's and the Inculcation of Managerial Habitus

In this paper, I draw extensively on Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*. As the website "Social Theory re-wired" notes, "[h]abitus is one of Bourdieu's most influential yet ambiguous concepts". Embedded in Bourdieu's notion of *practice* is the idea that individuals, as actors, strategically utilize *habitus* to negotiate social *fields* (Swartz, 2002). Thus, Bourdieu describes *habitus* as a

System of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them (1990, p.53).

Habitus is then the embodiment of *cultural capital* – education, qualifications, distinction, aesthetic taste, *et cetera* (Grenfell, 2004), which is acquired through social and cultural reproduction (Jenkins, 1992).

Simply put, *habitus* is the constellation of behaviors, skills, knowledge and worldviews that one acquires through various socialization processes that allows an individual to strategically and (hopefully) successfully negotiate interactions in various social situations and fields. By extension, my use of *managerial habitus* refers to the constellation of acquired behaviors, skills, knowledge and worldviews that need to be acquired to successfully function in the role of a manager (agent of the owners) in the context of a business organization.

As stated above, I argue that the principal purpose of undergraduate business education is to inculcate in students various forms of habitus, which is both adaptive to and desired by the organizations that they seek to find employment. This habitus will serve the organization's interests by making those individuals so inculcated "self-controlling" actors within that

¹ This section is meant to serve only as an overview of the issues mentioned, and not as a comprehensive review of this literature. Authors cited are meant as representatives of the appropriate literatures, not as constituting those literatures. A comprehensive review would have required a separate volume.

organization, and elevate the need for various overt control systems (supervision, technological controls and bureaucratic controls). The inculcation of this managerial habitus is accomplished through several types of pedagogic action commonly found in business school classrooms. I will leave aside for the moment texts, lectures and case studies, which are the main focus of this paper, in order to briefly discuss the other forms of commonly used pedagogic action.

Within the classroom itself, one often finds the use of experiential exercises, typically in the form of role plays and games. In these exercises, students are asked to demonstrate behaviorally their mastery of appropriate management behaviors in the simulated organizational situations that they find themselves in. These are often filmed for review, and always critiqued by the instructor and often by fellow classmates. Behavioral errors are often highlighted, not only for the individual's learning, but for social learning among all classroom participants.

In addition to the behavioral evaluations that occur in experiential exercises, behavioral modeling also has more subtle forms in business classrooms. Business faculty traditionally come to class wearing "business attire", with haircuts appropriate for the corporate sector, and usually, among male faculty, without facial hair, as would be appropriate in business. Additionally, it is not uncommon for faculty to require students to come to class in "appropriate" business attire on days that the student is scheduled to give an in class presentation.

Films are also heavily used in business school teaching. Often they are commercially produced training films which are used to reinforce particular points already made in the lecture material. However, particularly among Management faculty, there is also the use of popularly released feature films or television shows which are analyzed in class using the lens of this or that particular theory. The logic of these exercises is that business school theory can be utilized to analyze anything in life.

There are also a number of forms of pedagogic action in the business school that take place outside of the immediate classroom setting. Among these are the use of "outside" speakers from the business community either on campus or during site visits, where students leave the confines of the campus and go to meet with business "leaders" at their location. In these activities, classroom lessons are validated and extended. Students observe that real live business people actually act and think in ways consistent to portraits in lectures and texts. Additionally, these activities give the student the opportunity to observe particular modeled behavior in the "real world".

These outside speakers and site visits are often conducted in the context of student clubs such as Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE), Society for the Advancement of Management (SAM), and the American Marketing Association (AMA). The goals of these clubs are to promote careers in areas under their purview - SIFE for entrepreneurship, SAM for corporate management, and AMA in the areas of marketing and advertising. These clubs also function to bring newer, less experienced students into contact with students more advanced in their program, thus allowing the junior students the opportunity to see what they should be like at the end of their educational process.

Probably the most powerful form of pedagogic action outside of the classroom is the use of internships in the later part of students' educational experience. In these internships, students spend from 120 to 240 hours gaining "practical first hand experience of business enterprise" by working in a job for which they will receive academic credit. Here, the role playing of the experiential exercise and the other modeling behaviors is transported to the "real" world of the business organization, where the student's adeptness to perform appropriate behavioral responses to particular organizational situations is judged, not by a professor, but by a member of the business community. Here, the demonstration that one has inculcated the appropriate habitus not only leads to a grade, but often to an offer of employment. Thus, internship evaluations are often seen as external validations of the internal pedagogic actions.

Thus, the various forms of pedagogic action within the business school curriculum can be seen as the elements for the inculcation of management habitus within the target student population. By the time a student successfully leaves a business school program, they are ready to be a foot soldier for the capitalist enterprise. In the rest of this paper, I will shift from broadly defined managerial habitus and the various forms of pedagogic action by which it is inculcated, to examine in more detail the pedagogic action associated with textbooks, lectures and case studies. In doing so, I will not be focusing on management habitus broadly, but rather on a more narrow aspect of that habitus as it is embedded in the inculcation of a new linguistic habitus within business students.

Language in Business

Since the early 1990s, critical and post-modern management scholars (primarily in Europe) have focused upon the role of language and discourses in and around organizations and how these discourses both shape behavior and world views within organizations. Special issues of the journals *Organization* (v. 4, #2, 1997), *Discourse and Society* (v. 10, #1, 1999),

and *the Journal of Applied Management Studies* (v. 6, #2, 1997) have all focused on these issues. While this literature has blossomed in the 1990s, it in fact has its precursors in the organization culture literature of the 1980s, where such scholars as Sapienza (1985) analyzed the metaphors by which two top management teams in two hospitals in Boston talked about the changes in their competitive environment. Here findings were that, while each team faced the "objectively" same competitive environment in the Boston area, they spoke about them in different metaphors, and those metaphors influenced the types of decisions and actions that they took.

While a review of this literature is beyond the scope of this current project, it clearly points to the fact that how organizational participants talk about organizations influences their world view. Thus the vocabulary - management jargon - in and around organizations will lead organizational members to take particular actions. In the next section of this paper, I will argue that a the principal role of lower level (often called "Principles" courses) business courses is to inculcate particular linguistic habitus in undergraduate business students by both introducing them to new, but circumscribed vocabularies to talk about the world. I will argue that these new linguistic resources shape these students' world view in a way that is beneficial to the organization.

Lectures, Texts and Case Studies and the Inculcation of Linguistic Habitus

All undergraduate business students are exposed to the same "core" of courses during the early stages of their business education. These courses consist of micro- and macro-economics, a year of financial accounting, principals of management, principals of marketing and an introductory course in corporate finance. These courses share some common features. The first is that the teaching of these courses is highly textbook dependent, that is, instructors rarely, if ever, use primary sources. Second, that an examination of the various textbooks in the market for any of these courses reveals that they vary only in such features as the level of writing and the use of color and graphics, but that they are highly uniform in content. Third, that a significant portion of the textbook is dedicated to introducing the student to new, specialized vocabulary. Finally, that typical mass-market texts come with significant amounts of instructor's "resources", including detailed lecture outlines and notes; test banks with both objective and essay questions, including outlines of correct answers for the essays; and instructor's case notes, detailed the correct student responses to end of the chapter case studies and problems.

Given the uniformity of curriculum between institutions, and the uniformity of teaching materials utilized, I will suggest now that the role of these lower level courses is to inculcate in business undergraduates particular linguistic habitus, related to the linguistic resources found in these materials, as part of the larger project of inculcating managerial (or at least proto-managerial) habitus in these students. I will argue that four forms of pedagogic action take place in these classrooms to accomplish this task - the reading of textbooks, the giving of lectures, the taking of objective examinations and the analysis of case studies. I will address each of these in turn.

The construction and pedagogic authority of textbooks

Very little has been written specifically about textbooks in the higher education literature. However, critical education theorists such as Apple (1988, 1993, as examples of a large opus) and Giroux (1981) have examined texts in the communication of "official" knowledge within the public school arena. Their argument is that texts control "what is to be taught", thus constraining and reproducing what is learned. Similarly, business school texts serve the same function.

The world portrayed in business textbooks is one of simplified certainty. They are distillations of management practice and knowledge (both folk and expert), which, in the world are highly contextually bound, contingent and probabilistic. However, in the texts they appear as normative, certain and universal precepts. I will return in a moment to the issues of how and what is included (and what is excluded), but first, I will look at the issues of pedagogic authority in the textbook.

As Olson (1980) notes in reference to textbooks in schools, "writing provides a means of separating a speaker/writer from 'text'... (p. 191)" and in doing such the text "has a 'transcendental' source, and hence it is above criticism (p.192)." He concludes that the textbook, in comparison to spoken language of particular speakers then is "assumed to have great authority (p. 192). "The transcendental nature of the voice of the textbook is important in understanding the authority vested in the textbooks utilized in the business school. Given the uniformity of content among the books, the role of individual authors in establishing content is minimized. In fact, the presentation of materials in the form of a broad survey of the field, not only minimizes, but actually obliterates the voice of the particular author. Written in third person passive voices, one is not presented with what the particular author thinks or believes to be true about management, but rather we are presented with a litany of what the recognized "experts" have found to be "true". Thus, what is included in the text becomes the received knowledge of the sages, and as Fineman and Gabriel note in their analysis of rhetorical techniques in organizational behavior

textbooks, "a text's persuasiveness can depend as much on what is excluded as what is included (p. 379, 1994)." Strategic exclusions can reduce ambiguity, and given the authority of the text, banish particular perspectives from the field. Excluded from the textbooks are any perspectives which question the capitalist project, suggest that organizations are or could be dysfunctional, or suggest that any interests beyond those of the stockholders might be seriously taken account of in the decision making process.

Lectures and the pedagogic authority of the lecturer

The second form of pedagogic action is that of the classroom lecture. This, in many ways is more complex than the issues raised by textbooks. Here, both the lecturer and the lecture bear their own (somewhat) independent pedagogic authority. The lecturer often brings two forms of authority with them. The first is based upon their institutional role. As the faculty of record, with the authority to both present material and evaluated student performance (an issue to be discussed later), the faculty assumes an identity transcendent of their particular personality. In this sense, they share pedagogic authority with all other faculty in all other disciplines. Here, however we are interested in examining their pedagogic authority to inculcate managerial habitus. In that role, we must examine how business faculty establish pedagogic authority beyond their purely institutional role. It is not uncommon for business faculty to create pedagogic authority by making reference to their connections to the business community. This is either done by reference to the business careers that they had prior to coming to academia or by claims about the business consulting practices that they have. Reference to these is either done at times in which they are talking about their biographies, or, often as insertions to lectures were a reference to their experience is seen as an illustration of a point being transmitted in the lecture. Thus, in the business school classroom, the pedagogic authority of the lecturer is derived through a combination of institutional and personal authority.

The pedagogic authority of the lecture itself is also highly complex. In part, the lecture derives authority from its consistency with the text of the textbook. That is, to the degree that it is consistent with the textbook, it is deemed acceptable by the student. This is not as problematic as it may seem on its face. All mass market textbooks in this area come accompanied by extensive supplemental materials for the instructor. This includes highly detailed lecturers notes, that include not only material that is included in the text, but also "enrichment" materials that reinforce the message in the text, but are not included in it (e.g., examples not included in the text "blue boxes"). Thus, the typical lecture is one that reiterates material from the text, utilizes third party examples (from sources like the lecturer's notes) and often inserts relevant examples from the individual's own experience. To the degree that these are consistent with the messages derived directly from the text, they are seen as having authority.

However, we must note that beyond consistency, lectures themselves (consistent or not) bear pedagogic authority. As Bourdieu (1991) notes, lectures are a form of the "discourse of authority" and as such are authorized language. As such they represent the delegation of that authority from higher, yet potentially obscured sources. Thus, the lecturer, in their speech act, is not recognized, necessarily as speaking for themselves, but rather is seen as speaking for the institution itself. Thus, the lecture (like the relationship of the textbook to its author) has the potential to be transcendent of its speaker.

Case studies

Case study analysis as a form of pedagogic action has its origin in the business school and has, overtime, spread to other administrative programs. The case study itself presents the student with a scenario, sometimes based upon reality² and sometimes fictional, to which the student is to bring appropriate theoretical and conceptual frameworks for its analysis. In doing so, the student demonstrates that they can take the general and universal and apply it correctly to the specific. As Stewart (1991) notes,

The management case study teaches theory by fulfilling two functions: (1) illustration (translating from the abstract to the concrete), and (2) socialization (conveying the paradigm that governs the theory's application) (p. 121).

² Even cases based upon real world situations are fictions in the sense that Geertz discusses ethnography, in that they are reductions and edited simplifications presented by a particular author.

Stewart continues,

The second function of the case study [socialization] is to help bring the neophyte into the community of the discipline. A case study conveys the theoretical paradigm to new members of the theoretical community by telling a story that shows the paradigm in action. Reading a case study, the neophyte sees not only what problems look like, but also what problem-solvers look like. By setting out the problem in such a way as to suggest how to play the role of the problem-solver, the case is in effect socializing the neophyte (p. 122).

Stewart's statements about case studies in general can also be applied to the case studies that would be included at the chapter ends of the typical business school textbook. However, these cases vary in one important way from the more general model of case studies in that they always include specific questions concerning the case which direct the analysis that the (undergraduate) student will do. Thus, in the early stages of socialization, the directive nature of the questions points the student to the specific theory that they need to apply - very little is left to chance.

The case, as part of the textbook, then carries with it the transcendent voice and therefore the pedagogic authority of the text. In addition, all textbooks come with their instructor's resource materials, which includes the supplied answers to the questions at the end of the case. Thus, not only does the question direct the student, but the answers ensure that the lecturer also follows the appropriate line of action in their discussion of the case.

In a large bowl, add lectures, textbooks, case studies and a pinch of multiple choice testing, and stir

In trying to understand how lectures, textbooks and cases come together to inculcate linguistic habitus in undergraduate business students, I would propose the following.

1) Management "knowledge" exists as both practices and as a corpus of academic research. In both cases, that "knowledge" is highly contingent, contextual, and probabilistic. That "knowledge" is then *entextualized* into textbooks and lectures (in fact, these two are interdependent, not independent, as discussed above), where it becomes normative, certain and universal.

2) That *entextualized* "knowledge" is then transmitted to the student to be absorbed through reading and listening. Further, as Fineman and Gabriel (1994) posit, this entextualization take a very particular form in textbooks, as lists of terms and their definitions. Thus, the student learns the discipline from both textbooks and the lectures as a series of concepts and sub-concepts with specific definitions. Particularly in the lecture material, those concepts (and their definitions) are linked to specific situations through the citation of examples.

3) The degree to which the student has integrated this "knowledge" is then evaluated in many ways. Examinations (particular multiple choice examinations) are utilized to see if the student has learned the content (the lists of concepts and their definitions) of the lessons (such as, "The five levels of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs are..."). More interesting, however, is the use of management case studies as a means of socializing proto-managers into particular ways of thinking and behaving in work related settings. Case studies act to develop a predilection in the proto-manager to think and act in a particular way when confronted with particular organizational situations. Case studies present the student a scenario of a particular problem in a particular organization and asks that student to put themselves in the role of the relevant manager. They are then asked to do two things, first, to analyze the situation given some particular aspect of management "knowledge" (that is to *think* about the situation) and then do determine what course of action is appropriate. In their answer, either verbal or written, depending on the particular course and instructional method, the student (proto-manager) recontextualizes the normative and universal to the specific situation at hand. The instructor, as evaluator, then has the ability to measure how well the student has internalized ("embodied"?) the cultural arbitrary through their use of the appropriate linguistic resources, either passing the student on, or creating more drills until the student responds appropriately. In the case of cases, if the student talks the talk, they are evaluated highly, as (s)he has demonstrated that they have become inculcated with the appropriate linguistic habitus.

Performance at Work is a Function of Ability and Motivation: a preliminary analysis

I have presented arguments above for the position that in the overall pedagogic action of the undergraduate business curriculum that lectures, textbooks, objective examinations and case studies function to inculcate particular linguistic habitus in students consistent with the overall goal of inculcating in these students a more general (proto-) managerial habitus which

will lead to self-controlling behavior of these individuals within organizations. In this section of the paper, I will carry out a preliminary analysis of the interlocking structure of these four elements. This analysis will be based upon the examination of one chapter in a leading principals of Management³ text and its supplemental materials. I have selected the chapter⁴ that deals with the topic of "motivation" as this topic is one of the more central both for this course and subsequent courses in the management curriculum.

The textbook

The text opens with an brief vignette about Levi Strauss and how motivation of workers was important to its performance. Then, the first boldfaced term that the student encounters is "motivation" which is followed immediately by a definition. In this particular text, all boldfaced and defined terms are also found in the margin immediately next to where they appear in the text. The student is then, with the aid of a graphic, introduced to the idea that work performance is a function of the workers ability, their level of motivation and the working conditions. While there is a brief nod to the issue of management's role in creating or maintaining good working conditions in this introduction to the chapter, this topic will not be addressed again in the chapter. The rest of the chapter focuses solely on the text's conceptualization of motivation.

The textbook then presents the standard litany of nine motivation theories. Like all textbooks, these nine are placed in three larger categories: needs/content theories, cognitive theories, and learning theories⁵ Each of these theories is presented in terms of its component elements and their definitions. Each is allocated approximately the same amount of space in the textbook. With each theory there is a brief example of how that theory might work in the workplace. Nowhere in the textbook are the theories placed in their historical or epistemological context. Nor are there any discussions of the theoretical controversies that surround some of these theories, such as the questioning of the overall validity of the Herzberg theory⁶. Like the term "motivation" discussed above, each element of each theory is boldfaced and defined in the text and then repeated in the margin. The chapter then concludes with another vignette, some exercises and two case studies for analysis (to which I will return shortly).

The Lecture

While particular lecturers may choose to or choose not to use the supplied lecture notes, I would suggest that even self-prepared lectures in a course using a text like the one under discussion would follow a similar outline. The supplied lecture script reiterates that material already found in the text. I prescribe that the lecturer identify and define each of the elements of the nine theories under examination. What the lecture notes do for the lecturer, however, is supply them with an example of how each of the theories might operate in a real situation that differs from the example in the book. This example in the notes would also act as a cue for the lecturer to insert an example from their own experience (thus enhancing their own authority). The notes, however, run directly parallel to the text. I would suggest that given the similarities of the competing textbooks in this area, it is likely that if a particular lecturer's notes are not derived from this particular textbook, they are derived from another textbook and are completely substitutable.

Multiple choice examination questions

Up to this point I have only briefly mentioned examinations and examination formats. All business textbooks, including the one under examination, come with extensive test banks consisting primarily of pre-prepared objective questions. The propensity in colleges of business is to give "objective" examinations, usually of some true/false questions and mostly multiple choice questions, often which are machine scored. The test bank that accompanies the textbook under examination

³ Bartol, K.M., and Martin, D.C., 1998, Management, Third Edition, Boston: Irwin/McGraw-Hill.

⁴ Chapter 12, pages 381-412, in the current edition.

⁵ Needs/Content theories -- Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Herzberg's Two-factor Theory, Alderfer's ERG Theory and McClelland's Acquired-needs Theory (often called Need for Achievement Theory); Cognitive theories -- Expectancy theory, Adam's Equity theory, and Locke's Goal-setting theory; and Learning theories (in this particular text labeled Rewards/Reinforcement) -- Luthan's O.B. Modification, and Social learning theory.

⁶ Some textbooks will make some note of the ethical controversy surrounding Luthan's O.B. Modification model.

here runs 574 pages of multiple choice, true/false, definitional and essay questions and their answers. On the topic of motivation, the test bank includes 96 questions derived from the chapter. These questions are broken into two categories by the test bank authors (who are not the same as the textbook authors): definitional questions -- that is those that either ask the student to define a particular term or to identify a particular sub-components of some larger category (for example, "The five levels of Maslow's Hierarchy are _____."); and application questions, which I describe as "if/then" questions, -- these are often in the format of "If x does some behavior, then they are manifesting y element of z theory". The second type of question requires that the student correctly associate a particular theory with a particular observed behavior. The importance of these types of examination questions is that they allow the student to demonstrate that (s)he has learned the appropriate definitions of the new linguistic resources that they have been given, at least in a simple recall exercise.

Case studies

Case studies, like the "if/then" type questions allow the instructor to assess whether the student has mastered the appropriate linguistic resources necessary to talk about the situation at hand. However, cases, being both longer and more complex than the typical multiple choice question stem, are also more capable of presenting ambiguity. At this level, in textbooks, case studies are always accompanied by specific discussion questions to direct the students' responses in particular directions. These questions point the students to particular portions of the textbook itself using phrases like, "Using cognitive theories of motivation...", "Explain how reinforcement...", "Assess various motivational needs...", and "Use expectancy theory...". Thus, at this level of their training they will be told which utterances are appropriate. To ensure that the instructor also knows what utterances are appropriate, scripted answers to the questions are supplied in the instructor's resource materials. I should point out that cases utilized in the later part of their training often do not include prompting questions, as the key test of those near graduation is for them to use the appropriate language without being given a cue.

Summary

What I hope I have sketched here is that textbooks and lectures serve to supply to undergraduate business students, particularly early in their training, new linguistic resources for talking about business situations. The degree to which these students have learned and internalized these new forms of talk are then tested and reinforced through multiple choice testing on definitions, and on the assessment of their ability to create appropriate utterances in response to more ambiguous case scenarios with which they are presented. Thus begins the process of inculcating these students with a linguistic habitus that is appropriate for managers in the corporate sector.

Linguistic Habitus and Organizational Control

I began this paper with a discussion of the "agency problem" and the control issues presented by white collar, managerial and professional employees, and much of this paper seems to be quite far from that issue. Let me return to the issue of control for a few moments. The work and decisions of white collar, managerial and professional workers is often beyond the grasp of direct controls such as supervision, technical controls and bureaucratic paperwork. Thus, they must be made to act in the organization's interests either because they want to, or because they believe or assume that it is the correct thing to do - they must be "self-controlling". Thus, organizations, like the state, are subject to the problem of governmentality (Foucault, 1991). The organization (like the state) must ensure that the individual sees their own interests as the same as those of the organization, which often requires the obfuscation of class interests, where the assertions of the organization are seen as "common sense". One means to this end is to ensure that these employees are inculcated with particular forms of habitus, including particular forms of linguistic habitus. By shaping the vocabulary and the way in which these employees talk about themselves, other employees, their bosses, their customers and competitors, as well as the way they speak about the nature of the enterprise (both in particular and in general), then shapes the way that they think and interpret the world. As these ways of speaking embed the interests of the organization, then they obscure power relations and act as control mechanisms.

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