

The 9th International Conference in Critical Management Studies

IS THERE AN ALTERNATIVE? MANAGEMENT AFTER CRITIQUE

University of Leicester

8-10 July 2015

CALL FOR SUB-THEME PROPOSALS

“There is clearly no alternative but to declare man’s freedom to exercise his faculties”, Herbert Spencer, 1851

“There is no alternative way so far discovered of improving the lot of the ordinary people that can hold a candle to the productive activities that are unleashed by the free-enterprise system.”, Milton Friedman, 1979

“There is no alternative to austerity”, Vitor Bento, 2013

Herbert Spencer was very fond of using the expression ‘there is no alternative’, especially as it related to his staunch defence of liberalism and the pursuit of progress. The fittest, he argued, will survive as society evolves in accordance with the law of nature. The liberalism that Spencer articulated as necessary and desirable has cast a long shadow on the politics of the present day. The natural laws that are defended today are those of the market; a fundamental set of laws to which, we have been told again and again by politicians and economists, we have no alternative but to submit. In recent history this translates as no alternative to capitalism, globalization, free markets, free trade, democracy, austerity and budget cuts.

With neoliberalism having washed over the world with unrelenting vigour, it can appear that there are likewise no alternatives to management and managerialism. Alongside the so called consensus of gargantuan global capital, and echoing through the halls of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, liberalization is not just to be achieved, but has to be managed. Neoliberalism’s sidekick comes in the figure of the manager. This elevation of management as a virtuous profession has ushered in the vast expansion of executive remuneration, the cult of the CEO, the massification of management education, the advent of guru managers and the export of managerialism to all sectors of society. These days we are also encouraged to manage ourselves through practices such as personal branding, developing communication content strategies, monitoring personal web citations and articulating a life mission.

The theme of this conference invites contributors to explore alternatives to the ubiquity of neoliberal market managerialism in all its many guises. Critical Management Studies has been effective at mounting a critique of various elements of managerialist ideology, but less effective at exploring and promoting different ways of thinking about organizing and markets. This begs questions of the purpose of critique in itself and the possibilities that may follow from critique. Critique might thus be positioned as an activity of articulating and enabling the possibility of alternatives, especially when those in power try to bolster their own interests by insisting there is only one singular and inevitable course to follow.

This conference aims to engage thinking that explores alternatives, as well as rejecting the idea that there are none. Such alternatives could be understood in practical terms of specific organizational forms and practices, or theoretical developments (particularly in feminism, anarchism, communism, green thinking and so on) that may inspire a generation of new forms of localism or alter-globalization as resistance to neoliberalism. They may reflect personal alternatives, relating to the choices people make in terms of how to live their lives in the context of a neoliberal globalized world. Even more generally alternatives might focus on the critique of economic, political, managerial and organizational dogma, as it becomes embedded as the supposed 'one best way' of doing things.

At this stage we are inviting stream proposals that address this theme and submissions are expected to include an outline of the proposed sub-theme (500-750 words), as well as a short description of the team of convenors, including their academic background and experience. We expect most of the submissions to be linked with the overall conference theme, but other submissions are also welcome, as long as they are likely to appeal to the wider CMS community. We particularly welcome proposals from convenor teams that are international in their composition with convenors coming from at least two countries. We are also keen to encourage critical proposals from the range of business and management studies subject disciplines (accounting and finance, human resource management, industrial relations, marketing and consumption, international business, etc.). In keeping with the ethos of the conference theme, proposals can also be for alternative format sessions. We are open to suggestions for workshops, symposia, experiential approaches, non-academic activities, arts-based research, performance activities and any other creative or non-conventional approaches.

Deadline for submission of sub-theme proposals: 1 September 2014.

Convenors will be notified by 29 September 2014 of the outcome of their submissions

For any questions you might have regarding this call for sub-theme proposals, and to submit your proposals, please contact Martin Parker and Mel Simms on behalf of the local organizing committee on **cms2015@le.ac.uk**.