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Towards Marshalling Remorse in Knowledge Transfer

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Abstract: In the manifold excesses of current Anglo-American managerial praxis, from short-term time horizons, grossly distorted expressions of managerial prerogatives and remuneration rationales and a calculated brutality far in excess of any Human Relations sensitivity, the need to inflate shareholder perceptions of the "bottom line" has led to a managerial immorality that staggers many ethical and stakeholders' boundaries. Post Enron, Tyco and others, can much change? Are all senior managers doomed to the moral/ethical vacuum of the "bottom line"? With remuneration packages deliberately focused around an economic-rationalist "brutality," what reflective space, what discourse allows and enables moments of remorse/regret and accommodates the inevitable need for personal accountability and attempts at restitution? Is it merely recourse to recalcitrant legal/governance codes that provides for accounting for managerial incompetence and ideologized greed? How will management discourse remember the current regressive nature of managerial behaviour? How will Knowledge Management, in full flight with rhetoric about the importance of Tacit Knowledge, deal with organizational incompetence?

Keywords: cultural audits, dialectical debate, downsizing, economic rationalism, emotionality, managerialism, organizational incompetence, psychological contracts, regret, remorse, social capital, trust, vulnerability audits

Introduction

AS CORPORATIONS AND agencies begin to recognize and count the long-term damage inflicted by rampant Managerialism, the question is raised 'has the cost/benefit analysis been carried far enough in an age when, arguably, managerial elites participating in the "slash and burn" or, more politely, "increasing share value", regimes might be asked to justify their individual complicity in the "economic and psychological holocaust" experienced by many under Neo-Liberal Political, and Neo-Classical Economic, dogma?' An epistemological audit of Economic Rationalism may help to precipitate and accelerate an appropriate reckoning of the socio-economic exclusion too many have been forced to experience. A search for managerial voices more prone to reflexivity, and regret, long overdue, may also help (Kouzmin, Dixon and Korac-Kakabadse, 2001).

The autogamous nature of Economics and its putative "value neutrality" renders Economic-reasoning outcomes incapable of tackling "wicked" issues and an insensitivity to the ethical/moral/social/political consequences of such reasoning. In the extremities of Public Choice Theory, claims made on behalf of efficient managerial action, Managerialism and New Public Management's (NPM) complicity in the socio-

economic costs of downsizing and re-engineering need to be confronted urgently (Kouzmin, Dixon and Korac-Kakabadse, 2001). As Vickers and Kouzmin (2001b: 96) point out,

> Management, however, is seldom specifically researched as a factor contributing to occupational stress (Solondz, 1995: 218) and nowhere in the 'seven deadly sins of process improvement' (Popoff and Brache, 1994: 23-26) are listed suggestions as to how one might go about sorting through the personal debris that necessarily accumulates from re-engineering the organization.

The topic of incompetence has been addressed in only a few contexts… 'with professional incompetence – the absence of ability, judgement or morals so total, incurable and potentially damaging that a professional's right to practice can be terminated' (Ott and Shafritz, 1994: 370) – is still not applicable to the practice of management.

Taking downsizing as one example, rather than just an impersonal dismissal of a number of employees to meet a goal, 'downsizing is an action that causes employees major personal problems. Aside from the obvious blow to self esteem are added the hidden effects of family upheaval, monetary prob-

lems, relocation, depression, family break-ups and worse' (Ayling, 1997: 12).

Regressive Managerialism

Coercive, ruthless, instrumental frameworks and managerial assumptions (Kouzmin, 1980a; 1980b; 1983) continue to prevail, now within an information and communications technology (ICT) paradigm (Korac-Kakabadse, Korac-Kakabadse and Kouzmin, 2000) and management continues to be predicated on grossly expanding structures of prerogatives (Bendix, 1956: xxi-xxii) with executive remuneration prone to exaggerated forms of rationalizing industry benchmarks and the ongoing claims to "charismatic" leadership traits (Thompson, 1961; KoracKakabadse and Kouzmin, 1997a).

These prerogatives and leadership claims culminate in managerialist and systematic efforts to suppress or deny transcendental consciousness which characterizes managerial authority throughout the industrial world (Kouzmin, 1980a: 131), especially within Anglo-American praxis, and managerial "failure" is seldom acknowledged, let alone sanctioned.

Whilst the "troubled worker" (Hartwell et al., 1996: 804; Hopkins, 1997: 1216) is seen by management to reflect the "problem," especially in supervisory training contexts (Vickers and Kouzmin, 2001a: 63), the "troubled manager" is conspicuously absent in a managerialist discourse with pretence to value-free, scientific status (Giacolone and Greenberg, 1997; Burke and Cooper, 2000).

Vickers and Kouzmin (2001a: 71) have noted that 'there have been concerns about the instrumental application of emotionality in organizations. Hochschild (1983) has commented on the increasing use of emotional labour in organizational life; that emotional labour is a key feature of the work that many [non-managerial] people do (Hochschild, 1983; Gabriel, 1998: 292)….. in the "smiling business".

But what of emotionality, remorse and regret at senior management level? Can management transcend "reaction formation" (Thompson, 1961), or career aspirations, in coming to terms with their own complicity in managerialist brutality? As Vickers and Kouzmin (2001b; 111) argue, '[Managerialism] is not only regressive about behavioural aspects of Weberian "Ideal Typing", it is regressive about the career stability and behavioural concerns .it is also regressive about all aspects of psychological contracts well-known to organizational theorists for some decades' (Korac-Kakabadse, Korac-Kakabadse and Kouzmin, 1998).

Korac-Kakabadse, Korac-Kakabadse and Kouzmin (1999b: 526) argue that:

work life involves more than just doing one's job. Employees bring to the workplace aspirations and visions as to what their futures hold; providing the basis for career interests that may be independent of the job being performed. They also bring personalities; attitudes; values; preferences and beliefs and sets of commitment from outside work, allowing these external interests to shape the way they act in relation to the job, career and the organization (Organ, 1990). The tensions existing between different interests one wishes to pursue makes the individual relationship to work inherently "political" (Morgan, 1986: 150), even before one takes into account the existence and actions of other organizational members.

Further, according to Morgan, 1986: 151), management needs to understand that, 'like management itself, motivating factors that under-pin the varied styles of extra role behaviours of careerism; gamesmanship; task commitment; rigidity; "turf protection"; zealousness; detachment and free wheeling lend the politics of organizational life its detailed character.'

The Ongoing Control Paradigm

Control has been a central and problematic variable in Organization Theory (Kouzmin, 1980a; 1980b; 1983) and organized life; the basic tension being that in subordinating action to the managerialized will of the organization, actors surrender autonomy in organizational participation (Barnard, 1938: 17). The highly bureaucratic management model, as evolved from the manufacturing industry, has dominated management and administrative philosophy this century (Kouzmin, 1980a: 1980b; 1983) and, at same time, facilitated organizational growth based on high-volume, low-cost strategies for more than 50 years.

In the US, for example, big business preceded, or at least coincided with, the welfare state (Adams, 1992). Unionism, job security and worker participation were strenuously opposed. The artificial separation of "thinkers" from "doers" resulted in lower quality and lower productivity, chronic absenteeism and indifference (Reich, 1989; 1993). In an attempt to upgrade management as a means of increasing productivity, Anglo-American praxis adopted concepts of quality circles, work groups, encounter groups and teams, without, however, fundamentally changing underlying organizational assumptions. These attempts were exemplified by *Theory Z*, or how American business could meet the Japanese challenge (Ouchi, 1982), and other "how-to" books in the "best" US tradition (Pascale and Athos, 1981). However, these adaptations could not meet operational praxis while business was dominated by professional managers indoctrinated with traditional, coer-

cive management theory (Kouzmin, 1983; Kouzmin and Jarman, 1989).

Under Economic Rationalism, however, economists' demand to conceptualize complex organizational design issues merely in terms of organizational "black boxes" interacting with informational and cost influences (transaction costs) (Williamson, 1975), underscores vulnerability to economic dogma, especially unfettered in non-routine management and risk-assessments context. Organizations are more than asymmetrical, least-cost, information-seeking entrepreneurial units. As in governance, so too with issues of complex organizational and inter-organizational capabilities, new paradigms require that "knowledge/information" join capital and labour as core factors of production.

The Vulnerability of Anorexic Organizations

What Economists, Accountants and Managerialists do not understand are the behavioural realities underlaying their "rationalities". Cutting buffering capacity or "organizational slack" through re-engineering, downsizing or de-layering produces the survivor's syndrome—low morale, lack of trust and a decline in commitment to the organization amongst "survivors" (Brockner et al, 1993; Cascio, 1993). These outcomes have multiple and ripple effects on virtually every aspect of business or agency activity, as survivors find themselves in 'new, and not necessarily friendly, environments' (Cascio, 1993: 95).

As a result, the terms of the "psychological contract" in the "lean" organization are fundamentally altered (Cascio, 1993: 103; Korac-Kakabadse, Korac-Kakabadse and Kouzmin, 1998). Worry-laden actors with low self-esteem direct their motivation to keeping their jobs, not to achieving inter-organizational goals so vital in management response and effective organizational capacity (Brockner et al, 1993; Hequet, 1995). If such conditions and exposure to high levels of uncertainty are left unattended for a prolonged period of time, actors undergo a changed "world-view" (Erikson, 1994), often leading to a mistrust of organization and manifested in the fostering of conservative, inward-looking management styles which act in a counter-entrepreneurial drive. Alternatively, there develops an institutional insensitivity to longer-term organizational requirements which, with time, can lead to "creeping crises" (Kouzmin and Jarman, 1989; Jarman and Kouzmin, 1990).

For example, the American Management Association's survey of downsizing in 1993 found that 80 per cent of surveyed organizations that had downsized reported decreased employee morale; 13 per cent reported no change in employee morale; and 2 per cent reported increased morale (Fillipowski, 1993). Similarly, an Australian study found that 95 per cent of organizations that had undertaken structural changes through "re-engineering" had not achieved projected benefits (Saker, 1995).

The primary reason downsizing, eventually, will fall into disfavour is the major, long-term effects that are difficult to recover from. According to Ayling (1997: 160-164), downsizing:

- Creates a disjointed organization and creates inefficiencies.
- Laying off good people hurts the organization beyond any short term gains.
- Morale becomes severely depressed.
- Creates a pool of highly-motivated ex-employees competitors would be wise to employ.
- Reduces employee loyalty.
- Reduces customer satisfaction.
- Weakens the organization which, in turn, strengthens the competition.

Recognizing Emotions in Managerial Behaviour

From the psychological perspective, adult emotional experience has been viewed as resulting primarily from the cognitive appraisal process an actor employs when making sense of, evaluating, determining choices of action and then responding to circumstances and events (Lazarus, 1982; 1984). Each of the basic emotions such as anger, anxiety and depression, has been shown to be mediated and sustained by a pattern of thinking more or less peculiar to that particular emotion (Roseman, 1984; Smith and Ellsworth, 1985; Ingram et al, 1987a; 1987b). The "feeling" aspect of emotions tends to refer to the subjective experience of actors which arises from appraisal processes and from psychological changes triggered by personal processes and mediated through the neuro-endocrine system. These psychological changes also demonstrate specific patterning for different emotional states. Emotions are both an essential part of the fabric of human experience and play a crucial role in determining the nature and quality of a person's day-to-day functioning (Korac-Kakabadse, Kouzmin and Korac-Kakabadse, 1999a: 14).

Sometimes, emotional reactions disrupt rather than interrupt ongoing behaviour and have mal-adaptive or dysfunctional consequences. Strong anxiety reactions can result in emotional "freezing", making it impossible to take preventive or avoidance action and resulting in behaviour such as rage, even violence or depression. Managers can be elated by the success of gaining a promotion or a new project; happy with an appraisal report; anxious at not knowing whom to trust in an organization; angered

by what they see as unreasonable senior management behaviour or treatment of employees; fearful of being made redundant or guilty because of keeping their jobs while colleagues are made redundant (Korac-Kakabadse, Kouzmin and Korac-Kakabadse, 1999a: 14-15).

While many organizations have developed contingency plans for cases of routine accidents (fire, flood or burglary), very few have strategies for coping with employee violence or, even, with employee's other dysfunctional emotions such as anger, anxiety, guilt and derision. Most executives and managers have not been prepared, either intellectually or emotionally, to face extreme dysfunctional emotional events and symptoms of those events are often ignored (Korac-Kakabadse, Kouzmin and Korac-Kakabadse, 1999a: 15).

For example, the common attitude towards employee shooting sprees and similar threats is that they are incidents to be found only in newspapers (Mitroff and Kilmann, 1984). The reality is that such incidents, in the USA, claim over 750 lives every year (Herman, 1992). Often a fired employee, an angry employee, a relative of an employee, a disgruntled customer and even strangers commit workplace violence (Herman, 1992).

People get angry, anxious and depressed when they cannot cope with changes that take place. People are often angry when they find that they lack the skills needed to get another job. People are angry when their employers break the old covenant and offer nothing to take its place (Waterman, Waterman and Collard, 1994). Similarly, when an actor perceives that his or her beliefs, standards and actions are violated, they get angry. They may privately or publicly think in absolute terms (Ostell, 1991; 1992), condemning in imperative or moralistic judgement the perceived wrong-doing (Ellis, 1989).

(Korac-Kakabadse, Kouzmin and Korac-Kakabadse, 1999a: 15) observe that the vast majority of dysfunctional emotional signs and symptoms never develop into violence or manifested illness and, therefore, are not managed at all (Toohey, 1993). However, related dysfunctional emotional violence may become a reality in the workplace as erosion of the social contract, and with it trust, takes place. In Australia, for example, before de-layering exercises as part of downsizing, stress claims in Commonwealth government departments, alone, represented approximately 5 per cent of all compensation claims and 18 per cent of all costs of claims (Toohey, 1993).

Withdrawn, sulking colleagues, or ones aggressive and un-cooperative, can have a very destructive impact upon the performance of others and upon personal relationships within a group and clients. Although the actor might have "legitimate" reasons for reacting emotionally in the case of lay-off or unfair treatment, it is important for management to "manage" such reactions, including their own (Korac-Kakabadse, Korac-Kakabadse and Kouzmin, 1999a: 16). Executives and managers need considerable upgrading in mentoring and counselling skills, at crucial moments of re-engineering and downsizing exercises (Reddy, 1987; Lang et al, 1990; Sidney and Phillips, 1991).

Trust as Part of Social Capital

Many psychologists, sociologists, management theorists and practitioners appear united on the importance of trust in the conduct of human affairs. Blau (1964: 99) described trust as 'essential for stable social relationships'. Weber (1922) claimed that the exchange of goods is possible only on the basis of far-reaching personal confidence and trust (Korac-Kakabadse, Korac-Kakabadse and Kouzmin, 1999a: 11).

Due to economic pressure (permanent unemployment; permanent under-employment; and decline of middle class); changing business needs (shift from products to services; shift to human-based services; focus on core business; cost reduction and customer focus); demographic changes (female-dominated workforce; ageing workforce and decline in youth population); organizational dynamics (globalization; minimalist/line organizations; externalized work; demise of traditional organization and demise of traditional management); and technology change (invisible collaboration; virtual companies/teams; global communication/interaction; personal corporate infrastructure; mobility and opaque work domain), the nature of the social contract is changing (Korac-Kakabadse, Korac-Kakabadse and Kouzmin, 1998: 150).

The current dynamic in society and in organizations, beside some perceived increase in efficiency, carries the erosion of the social contract. This erosion of the social contract is twofold; at the functional and organizational level. Erosion of the social contract is less visible at the functional level, where the permanent workforce is losing its identification with function. Because of multi-task teams and streamlining processes, the erosion of trust in the externalized workforce is more visible, as loyalty to an organization disappears. With the erosion of loyalty occurs a further erosion of trust (Korac-Kakabadse, Korac-Kakabadse and Kouzmin, 1998: 151).

For example, Meeker (1983: 321) asserts that the 'trusting person expects helpful or co-operative behaviour from the other'. This is not always the case in highly competitive, lean organizations where individuals are preoccupied with self-preservation. From the leadership (transactional and transformational)

perspective, Butler and Cantrell (1984) propose five specific dimensions of trust. They propose four moral values – integrity, consistency, loyalty and openness among the five dimensions of a behavioural definition of trust – the fifth being competence/technical knowledge (Korac-Kakabadse, Korac-Kakabadse and Kouzmin, 1999a: 13). How do these moral values configure in any capacity for remorse, regret or the need for restitution?

Towards Some Strategies of Recognizing and Harnessing Regret

Although self-management teams are not new phenomena, they have received scant attention over many years (Sennett, 1979; Ramsay, 1980; Kouzmin, 1983). Group literature suggests that groups with a moderate amount of cohesion produce better decisions than low- or high-cohesive groups, irrespective of their structure (Callaway and Ester, 1984; Lean, 1985). However, the effect of these groups is dependent on the organizational context. Highly cohesive groups, characterized by "Group-Think", make the poorest decisions, despite high confidence in those decisions or the flexibility or rigidity their structure (Callaway and Ester, 1984; Lean, 1985).

Unobtrusive control is built into vocabulary; structure of communication; attitudes; beliefs; rules and procedures which, unquestioned, none the less exert a decisive influence on group outcomes (Perrow, 1967). These factors shape decision premises. These premises often act as mental "straitjackets" that prevent individuals from "seeing" other ways of formulating basic concerns and alternative courses of action that are valuable (Morgan, 1986). Many of those constraints are built into group and organizational assumptions, beliefs and practices about individuals and other groups. Control of decision-making process is usually more visible than the control of decision premises (Morgan, 1986: 166). The following strategies are proposed in the minimization of the "dark-side" of managerial cultures and dysfunctional, group decision making (Korac-Kakabadse, Korac-Kakabadse and Kouzmin, 1999b: 537-539).

Promoting Quality in Decision Making

Individuals who practice quality decisions tend to avoid ethical mistakes. Improving the quality of decision making ensures that most consequences of action are considered. It implies having accurate assessment of the risks associated with possible strategies and being attuned to the pitfalls of egocentric biases. One approach is to make decision processes as open as possible and to invite input from interested parties. This draws out all group members and prevents domination by one person. Openness is often a signal to potential opponents that nothing is being hidden and nothing is feared.

Promoting Breadth in Decision Making

Breadth refers to assessment of the full range of consequences that decisions may entail. An ethical audit of a group must take into account the outcomes for all stakeholders. The first task is to identify stakeholders. The second is to evaluate a decision's likely impact from the stakeholder's perspective. A full account for decision making must include a community-impact assessment. If there is community opposition to a decision, it is better to address it early rather than risk being ambushed later. Directions taken by self-directed groups, such as management, affect not only the present but also the future of the group.

Promoting Honesty

In discussing quality and breadth, there is need for openness but also for honesty. A good litmus test for a decision's openness is the scrutiny of public opinion. A variation of this is the "sunshine test"; that is, to imagine how one would feel if one's ideas were to be seen on the front page of the press. With hierarchies collapsing (Abrahamsson, 1977) and less power derived from formal rank, there will be added emphasis on negotiation and persuasion. Team members will increasingly have to elicit the cooperation of employees over whom they have no formal authority and will increasingly need to utilize persuasion skills (Bass, 1975).

Rotation and Training

Periodically, it is necessary to rotate new members into groups and old members out (Cosier and Schwenk, 1990). Groups can become prisons of set ways of doing things and set patterns of seeing the outside world, of gathering information, of defending customers and markets. What were once core competencies, if cultivated too long and too tightly, are liable to become core rigidities, likely to breed incompetence in responding to new circumstances. In addition to technical competencies, employees need development of capabilities in decision making, personal responsibility and ethics (Drake and Drake, 1988).

Promoting Dialectical Debate

Dialectical discussion, devil's advocate roles or outside experts can challenge groups. The dialectic method can programme conflict into group decisions (Rosenthal, 't Hart and Kouzmin, 1991; 't Hart, Rosenthal and Kouzmin, 1993) while offsetting potentially unethical behaviour. The dialectic method

calls for structuring a debate between conflicting views regardless of members' personal feelings (Cosier and Schwenk, 1990).The benefits of the dialectic method are in the presentation and debate of the assumptions underlying proposed courses of action (Benson, 1977; Brown, 1978). False or misleading summations become apparent and can head off unethical decisions based on poor assumptions (Sims, 1992).

Cultural Audits

Periodically, it is also necessary to conduct cultural audits (Korac-Kakabadse and Kouzmin, 1997b). The purpose of cultural audit is to determine whether changes are needed in the organizational climate, codes and the enforcement of cultural and ethics policies. Such audits require careful analysis of the existing practices in the organization, including the validation of current practices, determining questionable external issues (relations with clients) and internal issues (whether the organization's own reward system hinders the performance of certain quality procedures). Furthermore, implementing a new cultural policy requires support in the form of change and ethics training programmes for all employees. These programmes need to interpret the underlying cultural, ethical and legal principles and present practical aspects of carrying out procedural guidelines (Drake and Drake, 1988).

A cross-cultural study of Irish, British and US managers (Alderson and Kakabadse, 1994: 439) highlights that the impact of top management influence on the behaviour and attitudes of personnel lower down the organization varies according to national culture and identity.

The study emphasized that British and Irish top management need to behave according to the ethical standards they have set. The whole of the executive team needs to constantly display a behaviour pattern that accentuates commitment to the organization's code of behaviour (Alderson and Kakabadse, 1994). The study concluded that codes of ethical behaviour, in whatever form (lengthy documents to a brief section in the mission statement), require the clear communication of organizational values which are being espoused and that this 'responsibility falls inexorably on top management' (Selznick, 1957; Alderson and Kakabadse, 1994: 439). Thus, although socialization and cultural differences shape one's ethical beliefs (Preble and Miesing, 1984), learning and reinforcement processes are instrumental in relearning and substituting newly desired behaviour for existing, inappropriate ones (Mathews, 1988). Managers apparently need courage, as well as an ethical infrastructure, to lead restructuring and networked organizations forward.

Vulnerability Audits

Vulnerability audits by institutional leaders help to analyze and predict how organizational disturbances (re-engineering, downsizing, crises) might affect organizational performance (Hood and Meg Huby, 1988). For example, during re-engineering, organizations use vulnerability analysis to predict how cutbacks of resources will be distributed – what disappears, what survives, what prospers? Organizations may be resilient against spending cuts but be highly vulnerable to staff cuts, marketing strategy, IT adoption or management training, to mention just a few longer-term vulnerabilities. Identifying these vulnerabilities is necessary, but equally important is the effective management of identified vulnerabilities and learning how to be prepared for the unthinkable (Kouzmin and Jarman, 1989; Anheier, 1999; Harvey et al., 2001) – and certainly beyond CEO remuneration packages.

Conclusion

Ethics, remorse and restitution have been ignored phenomena in managerialist discourse for some time (Korac-Kakabadse, Korac-Kakabadse and Kouzmin, 2002). It should, by now, be conventional wisdom that networks and IT-driven re-structuring of organizations have axiomatic connotations for ethics and some awareness of a broader requirement for managerial restitution. Whether these virtues of reflective emotionality can be extended to wider employment situations, especially driven by so-called inevitable IT imperatives, is certainly problematic and requires more detailed, and urgent, investigation.

Some advocate that managers need to "forget" what they know to enable them to learn new knowledge (McGill and Slocum, 1993) – to let go of the prevailing "realities" and learn a new praxis. How can this be achieved in the face of Neo-liberal ideology and propaganda currently engulfing the meek and the bold? (Kouzmin, Dixon and Korac-Kakabadse, 2001). It is extremely difficult, without high levels of personal sense of culpability, to develop multiple frames of reference in managerial decision making. Serious analyses about decline caused by incompetence [or myopia] within organizations hardly exist (Cameron, Sutton and Whetton, 1988; Ott and Shafritz, 1994: 373).

As this paper implies, cultural and ethical leadership dynamics and complex motivation/citizenship behaviour (Giacalone and Greenberg, 1997), within vulnerable organized settings, also require critical re-examination. The litany of stupidity, failure, "group think", incompetence, myopia and calculated rationalization in managerial behaviour is long overdue for some serious scrutiny and debate.

Organizational incompetence involves 'issues and questions of organizational power; adaptation; pattern maintenance; learning; survival; social justice and worth' (Ott and Shafritz, 1994: 375). Is Knowledge Management and Knowledge Transfer up to it? Possibly, but to date, one suspects that Knowledge Management is too akin to alignment with "success" stories, rather than failure benchmarks. A Frank Sinatra refrain too easily finds its metaphorical way into MBA curriculum and, far too often – so much so that a "Nuremburg" defence, even a Milgram (1974) defence, is far too sophisticated a position for budding entrepreneurs business schools produce and legitimate! The tide must turn, but will the collective Knowledge Memory of managerial culpability remember to add to the list of social and political opprobrium economic/managerialist ones?

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