

Mode i ledelsesteorien - som en mode i sig selv

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An Explorative Study.

The Fashion of the "Fashion Perspective"

in the Study of Management Theory

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Abstract

In recent years we have seen a growing number of studies focusing on the production, distribution and consumption of management knowledge. One of the dominating perspectives in these studies is the "Fashion Perspective" as it is called in this article. This perspective focuses on the non-instrumental and irrational functions of (popular) management theory to managers.

The article sees the Fashion Perspective as a fashion in itself in the study of management thought. This interpretation is underpinned by bibliometric data and an analysis of selected Fashion Perspective texts. It is shown that "fashion" is seldom used in any deeper theoretical and technical meaning in these texts but rather seems to function as a derogatory word.

The second part of the article examines some examples of classical fashion theory texts in order to characterize the deeper theoretical understanding of fashion that is found missing in the Fashion Perspective in management studies. It is shown that fashion as more than a derogatory term implies arguments about the functions of the fashionable item to the social and psychological identity of its users as well as their claims regarding which group and social strata they - and non-users - belong to.

In the last part of the article 15 hypotheses are formulated regarding the social and psychological functions that the Fashion Perspective can have for management researchers that can explain its popularity. This is done for two reasons. Firstly, to illustrate and exemplify the deeper theoretical understanding of fashion. Secondly, to support the conclusion presented above that the Fashion Perspective can be seen as a fashion in itself.

Keywords: Fashion, Management Theory, Science of Science

0. Introduction

In recent years we have seen a growing interest in the study of the production, distribution and consumption of management knowledge (e.g. Abrahamson, 1991; Furusten, 1992; Eccles and Nohria, 1992; Huczynski, 1993a; Huczynski, 1993b; Furusten, 1995; Abrahamson, 1996; Furusten, 1996; Abrahamson, 1997; Kieser, 1997; Abrahamson and Fairchild, 1999). Earlier such studies could be classified in two main groups: Descriptive studies of the field as a whole or different sub-disciplines/fields that were relatively loyal to the field(s) in question (e.g. Landsberger, 1961; De Geer, 1978) and critical/Marxist approaches (e.g. Bendix, 1956; Baritz, 1965) that mainly saw management ideas as ideology, i.e. as ideas with the function of legitimizing managerial power. Today, a third group of loosely coupled and overlapping perspectives dominate, including neo-institutional perspectives (e.g. Abrahamson, 1996), perspectives that see management ideas as a language game (e.g. Czarniawska, 1997; Duimering and Safayeni, 1998), often inspired by Michel Foucault (e.g. McKinlay and Starkey, 1998), and as fashions. This article focuses on the fashion perspective (and most of the references mentioned in the first paragraph belong to that tradition). This perspective focuses on a) the short life cycle of (popular) management ideas and b) the non-instrumental and irrational functions that these ideas have to managers.

Defined in this way, the "Fashion Perspective", as it is termed in this article, can in itself be seen as a fashion in the study of management thought. What regards the short life cycle of the fashion concept in management studies, the data presented in figure 1 is relevant.

Note. Traces the number of articles in ABI/Inform as accessed at the Copenhagen Business School Library that contains one of the following expressions "management fashion(s)", "management fad(s)", "fashion(s) of management" and "fad(s) of management" in the text. The numbers are given pr. half year. Analysis made May 13, 2000. May-numbers are corrected to full year. All these articles cannot be coded as belonging to the Fashion Perspective. Some uses the concept to deny it, e.g. "This is not another management fashion", others rise the question "Is this another management fashion?" and some "agree" with it in some sense and belong thus to the Fashion Perspective as we see it. But even the distancing from the concept shows that the Fashion Perspective has established itself.

The data shows that before 1990 the concept of "management fashion" and its equivalents was not used. Then in a few years from 1991 to 1995 it experienced a surge of popularity. For a couple of years it was relatively stable and then from 1998 experienced a beginning fall in its use. The bell-shaped curve corresponds to what researchers belonging to the Fashion Perspective have found for popular management concepts and used as part-argument for the

fashionable nature of these concepts (Abrahamson and Fairchild, 1999).

The next question, in order to determine if the Fashion Perspective is a fashion, regards how the fashion concept is used in the Fashion Perspective literature. Is it used in a technical and functional sense to inform the analysis, for instance by using fashion theory? If the answer is yes, it should perhaps not be classified as a fashion, but as a new and interesting perspective. If the answer is no, it might be seen as a fashion. The word fashion might in this case be used only for the connotation saying that we, the researchers, are wiser than the managers are. Or it might be used as some kind of fashionable intellectual clothes put on seemingly for status and identification reasons. If it is used for some kind of analysis, how simplistic or refined is that analysis? In the analysis of the Fashion Perspective texts we especially focus on how the manager is portrayed. A simplistic use of the fashion concept usually implies that the user (here the manager) of the fashionable item is seen as an immature person easily manipulated by evil producers, somewhat similar to how parents and other older persons understand teenagers responsiveness to fashion when choosing clothes. More refined fashion theory is using sociopsychological and sociological theories to explain behavior and avoid user maturity and producer immorality as the main explanation. These distinctions between fashion and non-fashion and between simplistic and more refined fashion theory are not totally exclusive, but they lead to the research question about how fashion is actually described and explained in the Fashion Perspective Literature, which we will explore in the next section of the article.

But is it true, as implied above, that there exists a more refined fashion theory and a more refined use of the concept of fashion? In the next section of the article, we examine some examples of classical fashion theory texts in order to characterize their theoretical understanding of fashion. It is shown that fashion as more than a derogatory term implies arguments about the functions of the fashionable item to the social and psychological identity of its users as well as their claims regarding which group and social strata they - and non-users - belong to.

In the last part of the article 15 hypotheses are formulated regarding the social and psychological functions that the Fashion Perspective can have for management researchers that can explain its popularity. This is done for two reasons. Firstly, to illustrate and exemplify the deeper theoretical understanding of fashion. Secondly, to support the argument presented above that the Fashion Perspective can be seen as a fashion in itself.

The author of the article has recently resumed an academic career after 15 years as a management consultant. This change of culture has perhaps enabled the author to notice the self-serving and snug assumptions of many studies of management fashion. The aim of the article is twofold. Firstly, to explore the fashion concept in preparation of further studies of management fashion. Secondly, without denying the fruitfulness of the Fashion Perspective, to call for a higher degree of reflectivity on behalf of the researchers regarding their own motives and personal benefits of this perspective. And also to point out the costs to our understanding that comes from the fact that the fashion concept is used in such a shallow way in the Fashion Perspective. Much more perceptive management fashion studies are possible if management fashion researchers free themselves of their own status needs.

1. Selected management fashion texts

In this section I present some prominent examples of texts that describe or analyze fashions and fads in management thinking. The aim is to understand how the concept of fashion is used and how managers are seen in this literature. The first two texts are written by journalists. They are quite critical and take a nearly ironical attitude to management fashion. These texts represent the more extreme positions in the Fashion Perspective literature. The next texts are written by academic researchers and represent more moderate versions of the Fashion Perspective.

Mesmerized by the gurus

John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge (M&W): *The Witch Doctors. What the management gurus are saying, why it matters and how to make sense of it* (1997)

M&W, journalists and editors at *The Economist*, give a description of current management theory covering such current topics as business process engineering, organizational learning, strategy, the future of work, and Japanese management. The selection of ideas is good and the book is well written and clear. Their view of the producers of this knowledge is quite critical, however. The introduction is titled "The World of the Witch Doctors" and it argues that management writers and management gurus today are shaping peoples mind in a way that only poets did earlier. They talk about the "management industry" and divide it into three parts: management consulting, business schools and the "guru business" including the production of management books and speeches. As examples of gurus they mention Peter Drucker and Tom Peters.

All the way through the text M&W mention a number of criticisms against management theory: incapable of self-criticism, confusing terminology, only common sense obfuscated by jargon, poorly written, faddish and filled with contradictions, shorter and shorter life-cycles for the management fashions (now a year or two). Therefore, like astrology, management theory attracts charlatans (p. 370), which in turn worsens the problem. They do not agree to all this criticism but say that they see the field "as an immature discipline, prevented from growing up partly by its enormous financial success." (p. 21).

The book is mainly focused on the supply side of the management theory market. The irrational traits that they are describing are mostly seen as an expression of the strange personalities of producers - the gurus and the charlatans - with "decidedly abnormal lives" (p. 365) and their marketing abilities. It is rarely discussed why there is a demand for the irrational side of management theory. Only at a few places do the authors give some indication of how they view the demand side of the market. Some of the exceptions are in passages where they describe the passive and nearly mesmerized way in which managers seem to receive the message:

“Every year thousands of middle managers gape in awe as Peters, arms flailing, brow sweating, voice hoarse with preaching, urges them to nuke hierarchy and learn to thrive on chaos” (my emphasis, p. 89).

The two longest passages regarding the users are these:

“(Management theory’s) audience demands instant solutions. Anxious managers grasp at management literature as a panacea for all their worries. Many firms turn to management theory only when they are desperate. Their minds clouded by panic, they start out with exaggerated expectations, put the theory into practice for a few months, start to despair when it fails to produce results, and then turn to a new theory. Two years and twenty theories later, the business may well be bankrupt.” (my emphasis, p. 370).

“One reason for the narrowing gap between the fringe and the mainstream (in management theory) is that the generation that came of age in the 1960s, when Timothy Leary was regarded as a serious thinker, is moving into senior positions in business, consultancy and academia. Members of this generation are much more open to wacky ideas than their more cynical (or sensible) seniors.” (my emphasis, p. 363).

Conclusion. Fashion in management is the result of irrational and immature traits in the management theory market, both on the supply and demand side. Managers, representing the demand side, are seen as rather passive, whereas the producers - the supply side - are seen as more active and aggressive. Managers are not described as very critical consumers and their rational faculties seem reduced. This coupled with generational and situational factors often make them receptive to wild ideas.

Hot Air in New Balloons

Roelf Hoerner and Katharina Vitinius (H&V): *Heisse Luft in neuen Schläuchen: ein kritischer Führer durch die Managementtheorien* (1997)

“Hot Air in New Balloons” is the translated title of a German book similar to M&W’s. The authors (H&V) are also business journalists. In 22 chapters they describe 22 modern management concepts - including Kanban, Kaizen, culture, lean management, total quality management, and business process reengineering. The description of the concepts is journalistic and short but not obviously misleading or uninformed. There are extensive references to relevant literature. The attitude of the authors is sharply critical. The management concepts are seen as simply confusing and pretentious ways of presenting and selling nothing (“hot air”) or common sense knowledge. Each chapter has an ironical title, e.g. “Sushi for beginners” (my translation - chapter on Kaizen), “Mirror, mirror on the wall ...”

(benchmarking), "Boss - give your orders, we follow you" ("management by leadership" - playing on an old Nazi slogan).

The main part of the book contains these descriptions of popular concepts in management theory. Only in the foreword and in a short introductory chapter are there some indications of the perspective in which the authors see managers. In the introduction they write:

"Managers experience anxiety. Because they have much to lose. Management consultants experience no anxiety. Because they can only win... The anxiety of the one gives the other a life without anxiety... When managers make a decision - what they rarely do without making sure that other managers agree - they expose themselves to the danger of being wrong... Experienced consultants deliver much more than decision data, strategic suggestions and concepts: They deliver to their clients the good feeling of having made a decision according to the best available knowledge ..." (emphasis in the original, p. 11-12)

In the foreword they add another factor to the explanation: 'crowd instinct' and explains that what every manager does cannot be wrong, and if it is, everybody is hurt to the same degree.

Conclusion. Fashion is an irrational factor in the management theory market created by producers to trick consumers. The dynamics of the management theory market seems to be that a pecuniary interests is driving the producers of management fads (especially the consultants) and that anxiety and crowd instinct - as mentioned - explains the behavior of managers.

We now turn to the academic world and its analyses of management fashion and especially the reasons that managers seem to demand, accept and use such fashion.

The emperor with the invisible clothes

Alfred Kieser: Rhetoric and Myth in Management Fashion (1997)

Alfred Kieser is professor at the University of Mannheim, Germany.

This article starts with two stories. One is the Hans Christian Andersen story about the emperor that has been sold "invisible clothes" by some con men. Nobody dares to challenge the myth and say that the emperor has no clothes on. Only later (in the unquoted part of the story) a child dares to do it. From the context it is obvious that the emperor is the manager,

the con men stands for consultants, and the unmentioned innocent but daring child is academic research. The other story is about how Johann Joachim Becher convinced the Austrian Emperor in 1675 that he could produce gold.

Kieser says that today's management fashions have much in common with these stories: "bold promises, bustling consultants, magic, and sporadic reference to strict academic science." (p. 50)

In opposition to Abrahamson (1996) (whom I will present below) he argues that fashion in management should be understood in the same way as fashion in esthetics e.g. women clothes. Where Abrahamson argues that to a certain degree fashions can be explained from real needs ("performance gaps"), Kieser bases his explanation on social-psychological and "irrational" factors only.

The intention of Kieser's article is to explain fashion swings. On the supply side he points - as the journalists do - to the role of consultants, professors, editors of management magazines, publishers, commercial seminar organizers etc. A management fashion creates an arena for them to be active. By cooperating, the participants "can achieve their individual goals of highest possible profit, public image, power or career by widening the arena through luring further participants into it." (p. 57) He also includes the managers on that arena with the same motivation. Some managers are partly creators of new management fashions. Their motivation can be seen as progressive.

As opposed to the journalists, Kieser has a quite extensive discussion of the motives of managers who buy and use these fashions, i.e. the demand side of the market. He mentions a number of rather disjointed arguments why managers might be drawn to fashionable concepts.

- Fear of losing control in face of the unknown - the creators of the management myths can alleviate that fear and give a certain, if false, feeling of control.

- Under competitive pressure the wish to possess an effective method drives managers to accept new and promising ideas. "The wish becomes the father of the belief." Perhaps managers can be seen as gambling addicts. And they might be more addicted in times of crises.

- Adhering to fashions legitimize the behavior of managers.

- Picking up fashionable concepts is expected of managers.

- Change programs based on fashionable concepts can be used to increase the power of top management that might have been lost through decentralization.

Kieser also discusses factors that lead to the decline of a fashion.

- Fashions become old and lose their attraction.
- Fashionable concepts become overcrowded when nearly everybody adopts them. The concepts cannot then be used to distinguish the user from the non-users.
- When lower status organizations and managers start to use fashionable concepts the status effect disappears.

Conclusion. Kieser comes closest in our text examples to drawing on a more refined fashion concept that points to the social and psychological benefits of using fashion. The treatment of fashion theory is quite short, however. He still depicts managers as rather irrational, for instance driven by fear and unfounded wishes for controlling what cannot be controlled. Or, at best, rational in relation to goals that are normally not fully legitimate, for instance to acquire legitimacy through the adoption of popular concepts, to increase power, to differentiate themselves from lower status organizations and managers etc.

Management as rhetoric performance

Robert G. Eccles and Nitin Nohria (E&N): Beyond the Hype. Rediscovering the Essence of Management (1992).

The books introductory chapter starts by listing more than 50 popular management concepts - from globalization past the learning organization to intrapreneurs. The authors argue that many of these fads basically are old wine in new bottles (p. 4). The mechanisms of the management ideas market that create this situation is described in this way.

"The desperate search for quick solutions to eternal management challenges - combined with the opportunities this has created for managers, academics, consultants, and journalists who proffer solutions to these problems - has resulted in an impressive proliferation of nostrums, techniques, and philosophies of management. Typically, these "new" ideas are presented as universally applicable quick-fix solutions ... the result has been a dazzling array of what are

often perceived as management fads - fads that frequently become discredited soon after they have been widely propagated." (p. 7)

But these fads are not all useless. The central question is, however, whether a given fad and the way it is used inspire "robust action" (i.e. action that conserves flexibility) or not. This is a question of rhetorics. Good rhetorics inspire such action, bad rhetorics is merely words. "The fundamental problem with the flavor of the month phenomenon so common in many American companies today ... is that words are used carelessly without ever being connected to action." (p. 10). Therefore managers should see themselves as active users of "good rhetorics". "(T)he action perspective (as E&N call their approach, BL) ... can serve as a partial antidote to the contemporary search for a managerial elixir." (p. 14).

E&N address their book to "the thoughtful manager" who has "a healthy skepticism about the latest sure-fire solutions". They "suspect" that the legions of such managers are large. (p. xi).

In the main part of the book, E&N present some classical areas of management theory: management behavior - what do managers really do?, individual motivation, strategy, organizational structure, performance measurement, and organizational change. The presentation is interesting and well written. It represents good main stream sociological based organization theory sharing this traditions skepticism of some of the concepts and perspectives of the more popular management literature. Calling the concepts of the popular management literature "hype" and "fads" allow the authors to present their own ideas as the "true elements of effective management" (p. 8) and only now and then discuss popular ideas. The use of the word "rhetoric(s)" around the text does not always seem to make much technical difference. "Theory" or "thought" can often without loss of meaning substitute it. But there is an understanding all through the text that organizational matters can and is defined in very different ways, and that much organizational and management practice is a language game or language dependent.

Conclusion. Management fashions exist because uninformed or unscrupled producers offer ("proffer") managers a large number of quick fixes to their problems. It is unclear why quick fixes are sold, except for a certain "desperation" among managers, because many managers are actually skeptical of these offerings. The true and everlasting content of management does not lie with the fads but consist in stimulating robust action and creating identity through the use of rhetorics, which is described in the book for the benefit of the "thoughtful manager".

There might be a "real world" out there somewhere

Eric Abrahamson is professor at Columbia University, USA. He has written several articles on management fashion (1991; 1996; 1997; 1999). He is perhaps the most prominent "management fashion researcher" at this time.

In his 1996-article Abrahamson starts by arguing that some theories of management fashion only point to sociopsychological forces. As an example he refers to his 1991-article that argues that fashion demand is guided by managers' collective aesthetic tastes. He further refers to examples from the popular press, for instance Business Week, that explains the fashion process from the demand side pointing to managers' childlike excitement as the driving force. Other media have pointed to mass conformity and mass hysteria as explanations. Such explanations are close to what I recorded above in the journalists' section. But, according to Abrahamson, the sociopsychological factors compete with technical and economic forces in shaping fashion. "(M)anagers do not adopt management fashions only because of sociopsychological forces." (p. 255). They also wish to learn new methods, and management fashion can thus provide a setting for a learning process.

When unfolding this argument, Abrahamson turns it in a rather sociopsychological direction. In opposition to esthetic fashion that only needs to appear beautiful, management fashion "must appear both rational ... and progressive" (p. 255, emphasis added). A management fashion is "a relatively transitory collective belief" (p. 257, emphasis added) that a certain technique leads to such progress. If societal norms of rationality and progress exist, then - following an neo-institutional type of argument - Abrahamson expects that managers will tend to adopt such collective beliefs in order to appear to do the right thing. The norm of progress - if such one exists at a societal level - will assure that new techniques are introduced and old ones are rejected.

In an article the following year (1997) Abrahamson strengthens the "rational" argument. He analyses what he calls the "employee-management rhetoric" exemplified by Human Relations and relates it to long term economic cycles. He contrasts his study to Barley and Kunda's (1992) that had a pendulum type of theory that point to long time swings in management rhetorics between two cultural antinomies, rational and normative (organic) rhetorics. Barley & Kunda see a correlation of the prevalence of these two rhetorics with, but no explanation in, the economic cycles. Abrahamson argues that his data support a "performance-gap" theory where the needs of companies in different parts of the economic cycle explain the use of certain management rhetorics. Often the rhetoric is there before the cycle begins. Therefore, he writes in the end of the article, the new rational rhetoric (downsizing, reengineering etc.) might constitute the necessary conditions for a long-term upswing based on computer technology.

In his latest published article at this time Abrahamson and co-author Gregory Fairchild (A&F) (1999) analyze the rise and fall of the "quality circle management fashion". One of the research questions concerns what triggered the interest in quality circles. An endogenous trigger consists of the decline of other management ideas that occupy the same "niche". Only when the niche become empty a new concept can occupy it. The authors show that quality circles took over in what they term the "employee-management fashion niche" from job enrichment around 1978 and gave way in 1982 to total quality management. Exogenous triggers of the popularity of quality circles consist in discourse that describe and define a performance gap. A&F identified 3 such discourses. The problem discourse focuses on the Japanese threat. The solution discourse focuses on explaining the benefits of quality circles. Finally, the "bandwagon discourse reports the rapidly growing or declining number of successful or unsuccessful adopters of quality circles." (p. 726). At the time of the downswing three other discourses helped the concept out: general debunking (no good at all), surfing

strategies (arguing that the next concept solves the failings of the previous) and sustaining (arguing, for instance, that under the right conditions it works).

Conclusion. According to Abrahamson fashion swings occur against a backdrop of "real" management problems. Sociopsychological forces are not the only causes. The "objective-forces argument" is most visible in his 1996-article pointing to the importance of technological changes that determine economic cycles that together with the technological changes creates performance gaps that stimulate management fashions. But objective problems have to be defined for the managers in the general discourse. And solutions likewise have to be defined and appear as rational and progressive. Managers thus seems to be solving what is defined for them as real problems with what is defined for them as relevant techniques.

2. Fashion discourse

The academic literature on the production and distribution of management knowledge has its own fashions or traditions. In the introduction, they were roughly divided into three groups. 1. Descriptive studies. 2. Studies in a critical and Marxist tradition (keywords: "ideology", "power"). 3. A group of more modern, loosely coupled and overlapping perspectives, comprising neo-institutional perspectives (keywords: "symbol", "rhetorics"), language game perspectives (keyword: "discourse") and fashion studies that perhaps can be seen as the newest.

Considering the rather rapid changes within the "modern" group (that I return to below) it is interesting that it has been so little reflective - given the perspective - of the "clothes" and the language that it is itself using.

As an example, let us look at the A&F (1999) article referred above. On its first page (p. 708 in ASQ, 1999) the text contains 5 times the word "fashion", 11 times "discourse(s)" and 3 times "rhetoric(s)". On one page. They are all used to describe some kind of management thought not produced by the authors or their like. When talking of their own and colleagues work some of the following expressions are used: "(a) study" ("(T)his is a theory-development study" - they do not write "This is a theory-development discourse"), "(r)esearch", "we examine", "results suggests". By pointing this out I am not trying to drive home the point that science is also socially constructed (Latour and Woolgar, 1986) but to point out the strange use of words when it come to management thought produced outside academia.

The words "fashion", "rhetoric" and "discourse" simply have a negative value loading. It is a way of saying that something is of lesser intellectual quality or is adopted for non-rational reasons. A&F does notice that a word close to fashion has this connotation: "The term fad is frequently used in this discourse (i.e. the debunking discourse) to deride the use of quality circles and to influence the fashion downswing." (p. 730).

A way of testing the value loading of these words is to consider the thought experiment of asking a person wearing a fashionable piece of clothes: "why do you use fashion?" Most likely this person will answer something like: "I am not especially interested in fashion, but I find this piece of clothes nice, useful etc." (Cf. below in the section on fashion theory)

Actually, this kind of questions has been posed to managers regarding management fashion. Rling reports (1999) from interviews with Swiss managers.

"One of the most interesting findings are frequent assertions by my interview partners to be immune to the intrusion of fashion. When I confronted my interview partners with the idea that the spread of management concepts resembled fashion patterns, the majority instantly agreed that there were certainly fashions out there. But at the same time, most of them asserted that they were able to recognize fashions and prevent themselves and their organization from the (uncontrolled) intrusion of fashion." (p. 12)

I have seen the same reaction in interviews with Danish managers: fashions are what the others do or what have been. What I choose to do is based on a levelheaded evaluation of the concept.

These few data do not prove that fashion is not a useful perspective, even, perhaps, for explaining the behavior of those interviewed. But it indicates that the concept is value loaded and creates a distance to those about whom it is said that they are subject to fashion.

The choice of words is never really discussed. In the A&F article there is no discussion of why the word "discourse" suddenly is used to the extent noted. Neither are there any references to Foucault. The 1966-article barely if at all contains the word. Here the word "rhetoric(s)" dominates.

But there seems to be with the authors some knowledge that these words are not value free. In a footnote to the definition of the word "fashion" as "relatively transitory collective beliefs ... that a management technique is at the forefront" (p. 709) A&F write, "(t)his definition does not imply that fashions are or are not dysfunctional". The same technique is used in Abrahamsons 1996-article. In a footnote he explains his use of terminology in this way: "The term "rhetoric" can carry two different meanings. First, it can suggest that what is being said or written is not really believed by the speaker or writer. Second, "rhetoric" is language used to persuade. I use the term in this second sense only..." (p. 491). E&N writes, "much of the new thinking (that they also term "hype", BL) is basically old wine in new bottles... (but) (t)his is not to say that some are not useful" (1992, p. 4). "True, most of us today have a negative connotation of the word rhetoric ... (b)ut rhetoric has a positive component as well" (that the authors, E&N wish to focus on, emphasis added, p. 9).

This is an interesting technique. You get the best of both worlds. You allow yourself to use a word or an expression and then clear your conscience and image by an addition saying that you do not mean it that way. As a thought experiment you might try this with words like "Nigger", "Kraut" and "Chicken" referring to Afro-Americans, Germans and young women.

Managers as teenagers

The model of the manager in the management fashion literature I have looked at is quite diverse. But there are also a number of similarities.

- The picture of managers is not very flattering. The description has similarities to how older people and parents are describing the maturity of teenagers choosing clothes. At worst they are perceived as driven by anxiety and being susceptible to gurus and status arguments. When better they are seen - in an neo-institutional tradition - as pursuing goals defined for them with methods that are prescribed for them. At best some of them are seen as "thoughtful" i.e. receptive to academic research.
- Ideas and techniques of managers are called "fashion", "ideology", "rhetorics" and "discourse", "even if we do not mean that in a derogatory way", whereas the ideas of researchers are "theory", "research", "studies" and "data". The concepts of fashion, fashion, rhetorics and discourse are seldom explained beyond a few common sense paragraphs or put in theoretical perspective. There are a couple of pages here and there of references to fashion theory (Kieser, Abrahamsson 1996), rarely any references to Marxist or materialist theories (regarding the word "ideology"), seldom references to Foucault (for the use of "discourse") or to literature on rhetorics. When there are references, they do not seem to inform the analysis - to make a difference. One has to conclude that it is the image of these words, their connotations that are important to the authors.
- This picture of managers is seldom formulated explicitly. There is no "management man" model that spells out the assumptions in these studies.
- This picture of managers is not discussed nor tested. It is assumed, "suspected" or inferred from other material. Neither the question whether the implied "management man" model holds true, nor the question regarding the range of variation within the management community. Whether, for instance, there are segments of managers reacting in different ways from the majority (owner managers, self-made men, successful managers etc.). E&N "suspect" that the legions of thoughtful managers are large. Yes, but how large? And how many are the others - those they call "(m)anagers who are still looking for the silver bullet" (p. xi)?

3. Selected fashion theory texts

I now turn to selected fashion theory texts in order to get a deeper understanding of fashion than is offered in the Fashion Perspective texts.

Fashion as conspicuous consumption (Thorstein Veblen)

Why do some women wear hats that are extremely expensive, difficult to wear, and offer little protection against the weather? The answer is conspicuous consumption. Conspicuous consumption is a way to show that you are wealthy and do not have to care for practicalities. It demonstrates that you belong to the leisure class. Being rich is a problem because people cannot see it. In modern democratic times most people have clothes and do not need food. You cannot show that you are rich - or claim to be rich - just by having clothes and being reasonably well fed. You have to display your riches in other ways. Here you can use conspicuous consumption of e.g. fashionable and expensive goods, conspicuous waste, or conspicuous leisure. There is a status value to waste because everybody cannot afford it.

Veblen in his famous book "The Theory of the Leisure Class" (1899) does not directly discuss fashion or fashion swings. But the use of fashionable, expensive and useless items is central to his description of the leisure class. The argument is not that the rich use items that are fashionable because these items are accepted. It is more important that these items are technically and practically nearly useless. That they do not serve any purpose, but only incur costs. Because only the rich can afford that. Items that require a lot of work to keep are also attractive, e.g. fancy clothes need to be prepared well, ironed, silver need to be polished, fancy hairdresses take time to make, expensive cars have to be serviced more thoroughly, fancy and trimmed gardens have to be kept. Only the rich have time or money to do that. If the use of fashionable items also implies that they more often have to be discarded when a new fashion arrives, this is a further argument for the rich of using fashion. Only the rich can keep up this speed and afford to discard items that still could be used in a technical function but that are no more fashionable.

If you are rich enough you might need helpers to demonstrate your richness - or your claimed richness. They will do vicarious conspicuous consumption, waste or leisure for you that might reflect positively on you. These helpers can be your spouse, your children ("that you do not deny anything") or your employees (servants). The richer you are the more people you can have employed in these roles.

There is also the possibility of conspicuous consumption by affiliation. Actually, you are not rich and actually you cannot afford the full range of wasteful use. But you might choose some aspect, some fashionable clothes or impractical leisure that the real rich indulge in and use that as a symbol. Or you can in other ways signal the same wasteful attitudes, preferably in areas where it do not cost too much. The point is how you can look being wasteful and in leisure when in fact you are not. This is the beginning of the so-called trickle-down hypothesis of fashion that posits that the higher classes - the rich - initiate fashion to distance itself from

the lower classes, which tries to imitate the higher classes.

To be like and to be different (Georg Simmel)

Fashion in clothes and in other areas of life is an example of a very general conflict and compromise between two different forces active in society, the German sociologist Simmel writes in his treatise on fashion (1997). Human beings are dualistic creatures oscillating between these two forces or poles. The one pole is that of imitation through which the individual wants to be identical to the whole and to others. The other pole is that of differentiation whereby the individual wants to develop individuality. "Fashion is the imitation of a given pattern and thus satisfies the need for social adaptation; it leads the individual onto the path that everyone travels... (but) (a)t the same time, and to no less a degree, it satisfies the need for distinction, the tendency towards differentiation." (p. 188-89).

What can be used as signs for such a social differentiation? Anything goes. Fashion does not have to have any objective, aesthetic or other expediency. "Judging from the ugly and repugnant things that are sometimes modern, it would seem as though fashion were desirous of exhibiting its power by getting us to adopt the most atrocious things for its sake alone." (p. 190). "(A)ny given form of clothing, art, conduct, or opinion can become fashionable." (p. 204).

Concerning the concept of "fashion", it seems, according to Simmel, that we use it to designate something new, suddenly disseminated that we believe has significance as a sign of differentiation and that we believe will disappear soon again. "(A)nything else that is similarly new and suddenly disseminated in the same manner will not be characterized as fashion, if we believe in its continuance and its objective justification." (p. 193, emphasis in original)

Fashion is to Simmel not only a means of individual differentiation but also of social differentiation between social groups and social classes. Fashion keeps the in-group together and keeps the out-group out. The fashions of the higher social strata are used to distinguish the higher strata from the lower. But the fact that the higher strata use something will induce the lower strata to want to use it also. The upper strata used it for differentiation, but the lower strata now wants to use it for imitation. But if and when that happens the fashion will not any more be interesting to the higher strata and the higher strata will stop using it (the trickle-down hypothesis). This hypothesis or mechanism not only explains that fashion starts at the top, but also describes a mechanism by which fashion changes will go on and on.

The hypothesis or mechanism implies that the strength of fashion is dependent on the existence and strength of the two factors that causes it, namely the need for integration and the need for separation and individuality. The lowest strata do not need separation and fashion is thus nearly absent among the poor. Two groups that are very close need separation. The closer, "the more frantic becomes the hunt for imitation from below and flight towards novelty from above." (p. 190).

There are several individual benefits of fashion. The imitation side gives the benefit of absolving the individual of responsibility, it gives assurance of not standing alone and the individual is freed of thinking and even of knowing. In many situations it is socially safe and easy just to do as the others are doing. The differentiation side gives the benefit of showing that one belongs to a progressive and high status group, the right group, the envied group and sub-group that use the new. "We envy the fashionable person as an individual, but approve of them as members of a group." (p. 193). The envy that fashion evokes is, however, benevolent and allows the envied person a better conscience, because the fashions are not denied absolutely to anyone.

Fashion further has the benefit of allowing us to express our personality in a socially acceptable way. Under the protection of fashion we can be as strange as we like and express the most outrageous things. "(M)any fashions tolerate breaches of modesty which, if suggested to the individual alone, would be angrily repudiated." (p. 199).

On the other hand fashion protects us. Using fashion we can at the same time feel that we are not giving everything away. Fashion is often by the individual seen as something changing in contrast to the stability of self. "(F)ashion always stands ... at the periphery of the personality, which regards itself as a *pièce de résistance* to fashion" (p. 198, emphasis in original). Fashion is something that can be taken off. It preserves our feeling of inner freedom. Fashion is not us.

The individual benefits described can be stronger and weaker under different conditions. Individuals, for instance, with weak and dependent natures that at the same time requires some amount of prominence and attention receive more benefit from fashion. Seen in this way, fashion is for the weak. The weak find protection in imitation and show their individuality only in allowed forms of individuality such as fashion. This is the reason, Simmel thinks, that fashion in women's clothes are at maximum when women do not enjoy equal rights.

Societal conditions also play a role. The liberation of the new middle classes in democracy means a new playing field for fashion. Fashion is the tyrant that has taken the place of the old tyrants for the middle classes. The highest strata are, Simmel writes, as everyone knows most conservative, also in tastes and fashion. No change can give them any additional power. They do not need to define themselves as an in-group. They are an in-group. The working classes, on the other hand, are also more unconsciously conservative - or according to the earlier analysis has less need for differentiation. But it is within the new middle classes that the fight for differentiation among the weak goes on which leads to heavy fashion activity. These arguments are somewhat at odds with the idea that fashion starts with the rich (Veblen) and trickle down from there (Simmel, other part of argument).

Fashion as a code language of status as perceived by the self (René König)

The German sociologist René König (1973) sees fashion as the tipoff of broader differences and divisions, for instance of status. "(F)ashion ... is the code language of status. We are in an age when people will sooner confess their sexual secrets - much sooner, in many cases - than their status secrets, whether in the sense of longings and triumphs or humiliations and defeats. And yet we make broad status confessions every day in our response to fashion. No one - no one, that is, except the occasional fugitive or spy, such as Colonel Abel, who was willing to pose for years as a Low Rent photographer in a loft in Brooklyn - no one is able to resist that delicious itch to reveal his own picture of himself through fashion" (p. 27)

"In reality fashion is a universal formative principle in civilization, capable of affecting and transforming not only the human body but also all its modes of expression." (p. 40). Fashion does not have much to do with the objects that fashion is associated with. Fashion is not a technical feature of these objects, for instance clothes, buildings, furniture, the human body, facial style and expression, posture, illness and sickness, sports, literature and art.

König differentiates between "styles" that are more basic, longer-running modes of expression, and "fashions" that are shorter, rapidly changing modes of expression. As examples of styles in art, König mentions Rococo, Impressionism, Functionalism, Surrealism. Styles might start as fashions that become crystallized into styles. Fashion is the deviation from style, the challenges to style. At the fast end of the spectrum we have finally "fads" i.e. "minor manifestations of fashion, adopted for their very originality but usually dropped again after a short time..." (p. 42)

The taboo against fashion

The fashionable do not talk about fashion in terms of being fashionable, no "(t)hey talk instead of ease, comfort, convenience, practicality, simplicity, and occasionally, fun and gaiety (for others to share)." We observe "a fashion taboo that is common to people at every level of income and status today." (p. 18, Introduction to König's book by author Tom Wolfe, p. 15-28).

Author Lois Auchincloss is referred to as saying that at the core of fashionable society lies a monstrous - and false - vulgarity: "the habit of judging human beings by standards having no necessary relation to their character." To be found dwelling upon this vulgarity, absorbed in it, is like being found watching a dirty movie. People seem to think that fashion is something outwardly, something not relevant to the real self, but still use it for clues.

The fashion cycle

König gives a description of different phases of what could be termed the fashion cycle.

A fashion may start as a fad, as an experiment. Often the new will originate with the less attached that has nothing to lose by protesting the dominant fashion (a point that also Simmel emphasized). Those that are not afraid of being conspicuous - "a fair section of society's outsiders." (p. 151). Some time has to pass before others can adopt it. It has to lose its rough edges and the eccentricity must wear off by passing through the filter of the dominant behavior. König refers the classical advice never to be the first in a change of fashion ... or the last. This normalizing happens through an experimental phase where things are tried out. In this phase fashion creators (spotters and packers) are operative. They spot fads, i.e. potential fashions, from many sources including the outsiders and pack them and present them for the rest. The use of fashion in this phase might also be facilitated by role models, today, regarding clothes, mainly from the entertainment industry. The spread of fashion in this phase is dependent on the existence of a "scene", a stage on which the novelties are displayed. Earlier this could be the market place, now it can be the media. The role of towns and the rapid expansion of communication and travel make possible that everybody can see the new fashion. From thereon fashion is more concerned with adaptation and assimilation than with daring renewal. In the first period those who really want to be accepted - the newly rich, the immigrants, the new recruits, the criminals, the new elites in the developing countries, the young - will be willing to accept anything new that seems to lead to acceptance and social advancement. After this the fashion tends to receive general acceptance, first in the large middle classes. Here excesses are not valued and at this time the fashion in question is toned down and refined. But fashion will never conquer everybody. Society is always differentiated into different groups. And there will be some that directly resist fashion which however, as Simmel also noted, can be a fashion in an in-group in itself. After a fashion has reached its climax, it disappears as suddenly as it appeared. It is overtaken by a "death-wish, which is realized at the precise moment when a fashion has reached its climax and basks in the eager acceptance of the great public. Hence the veil of melancholy that surrounds every fashion. It serves to enhance beauty and enliven the drabness of everyday life; but its inescapable destiny is to die by its own laws and its own hands at the youthful age of precocious perfection." (p. 124). But even after a fashion is dead, it may live on. It is not sold or bought anymore, but the physical or intellectual products from a now dead fashion might still be used and thus visible. But they are not fashion anymore. Just objects or ideas in use.

König's life cycle model differs somewhat from the trickle down theory that he explicitly criticizes. He argues that there are recorded a number of historical situations where the lower classes were forbidden to imitate higher classes. The higher class wants to protect itself from the imitation of inferiors and they will with few exceptions never imitate them. "The strict class order of society thus knew only differentiation, but not imitation ... Imitation started only when the class order began to break up." (p. 99). In this way fashion is, as also Simmel pointed out, connected to democratization. König further quotes S. R. Steinmetz for the conclusion that inside a class, fashion only appears when there are cracks and divisions in the class. Class in itself is therefore not related to fashion. His implied model seems to be that two groups wholly separated from each other will not use fashion to differentiate between them. But two groups more weakly separated will use fashion to differentiate.

As a parallel to this he also notes (as we saw also Simmel pointing out) that the very rich today are not fashion leaders. "One might even hazard the statement that the very rich display a tendency to inconspicuousness which, among men as well as women, results in a distinct conservatism as far as fashion is concerned. ... The middle income groups, in contrast, are particularly responsive to fashion today." (p. 178). Fashion in clothes today begins in the

middle groups, from where it spreads upwards and downwards. In another dimension, he argues that fashion in clothes starts in the biggest cities, then spread to medium-sized cities and in the end to small towns and rural areas by which time it might be dead as fashion. Regarding age groups, the young seem to be the most fashion conscious and from there the fashion are spreading to other age groups. König believes that this last factor also changes the character of fashion in the direction that it more and more emphasizes youth. Some fashions that have started among the young - even if they today are not the only fashions here - are the anti-fashions, sloppy dressing, body presentation and casual looks, as well as the use of clothes from the working class and the developing countries that started after 1968. Altogether it is from the middle class youth of the cities that the fashion is spreading to the rest of society.

The (mainly positive) functions of fashion

Fashion is not just there because of evil producers that decent persons must protect themselves against (as the Fashion Perspective normally seems to assume). König quotes Freud: "At the root of every taboo, there must be a desire" (emphasis added). "(T)o the criticism of and attacks against fashion that have constantly recurred throughout known history, there is, on the other hand, a corresponding secret need for it, strong enough to break every sanction and to overcome every conceivable obstacle time and again." (p. 33-34).

One - in Königs view positive - function of fashion is to satisfy the basic curiosity of human beings in a relatively safe way. It allows a person to experiment, to be daring without it having full consequences. Fashion implies a certain looseness, a levity, and superficiality. One can experiment, even with previously not very accepted behaviors, and then afterwards say, should it be embarrassing to self or others, that it was only something outwardly. Fashion is, as Simmel argued, something you can put on and remove. The experimental nature of fashion means many false starts. The result is often seen on the rubbish dump. But this should not discourage us "for the human richness of continual self-renewal carries within itself its own justification." (p. 52). Fashion keeps the renewal process going.

Fashion is also connected to sexual behavior and the survival of the species. König refers to Konrad Lorenz and his experiments with what triggers animals, for instance, to fight. That can be an optical picture of an enemy consisting of different elements that in themselves - to a weaker degree - functions as a trigger, a colour, some feathers etc. König sees that as parallel to how fashion in clothes and in the human body functions. Cosmetics, styling and clothes add together, underline and exaggerate these triggers, whether they are sexual or oriented towards fight. In this way fashion is connected to the urge to dress up - both regarding clothes and in other ways - in order to conserve the species both through sex and fight.

Accepted fashion also provides for recognition. It gives clues to who you are and what group you belong to or wish to belong to, which is his main analysis of fashion as described above. It also makes it possible to distinguish oneself in a socially accepted way. It is a kind of differentiation that strengthens rather than weakens social cohesion.

Fashion as autonomous code language (Roland Barthes)

"The object of this inquiry is the structural analysis of women's clothing as currently described by Fashion magazines; its method was originally inspired by the general science of signs postulated by Saussure under the name semiology", writes the French linguist and anthropologist Roland Barthes (1983 p. ix). Barthes wants to explain the way fashion is described in these magazines (*Elle* and *Le Jardin des Modes* 1958-59). Not the fashion itself, not the clothes, but the words - "written clothing" as he calls his first chapter. He thinks that there are many words around fashion and clothes. "The reason is, of course, an economic one In order to blunt the buyer's calculating consciousness, a veil must be drawn around the object - a veil of images, of reasons, of meanings" (p. xi).

What happens, he asks, when an object, here a fashionable piece of clothing, meets language? Language has the function of defining and "immobilizing" the understanding of the fashion. It also has a didactic function i.e. it explains from an authoritative point of view what we see and what it is. What style we see, how we are to see it, what is worth noticing, and what it is good for. Language adds knowledge. Written fashion is also clearer, more one-dimensional. It does not describe irrelevant details. It focuses on a fashion message. He uses Saussure's distinction between language (*langue*) - the institutionalized rules - and speech (*parole*) - the actual use - to describe written fashion's relation to the realities of the picture. Written fashion is at the language end of the scale. It is more pure code than if you had the garment in case in your hand. (In the same way management books are more pure code than management practice).

The main structure of most texts Barthes describes as consisting of two classes. The garment and the world. Often the garment (or features of it) is the subject of the sentence and this subject has some features belonging to the world, e.g. "these shoes are ideal for walking" - shoes are the garment, ideal for walking is a feature of these shoes belonging to world, i.e. not part of the garment. Some of the texts only have one class, namely a description of the garment. This Barthes relates to the fundamental function of written fashion, namely to transmit what is at a current time fashionable. Thus the class of garment can take two values, fashionable and not fashionable. And what is in the fashion magazines is implicitly fashionable. Common to the two types of texts are that the garment takes the role of the signifier (it sends signals) about the world, but implicitly also about what is fashionable (the signified) and the second type directly about what is fashionable. Barthes makes this analysis more detailed in the later chapters and identifies four signifying systems: the real vestimentary code (clothing as signifier of World or Fashion - described above), written vestimentary code (sentences as signifiers for propositions), connotation of fashion (what is noted in the text of the fashion magazines signifies fashion - what I termed "implicitly" above) and finally the rhetorical system (i.e. the way the magazine talks about fashion, its phraseology that again gives signals about its view of the world). The first two systems are concerned with denotation, the two last with connotation.

Fashion, and especially written fashion, is in this book "just" a subject for analysis. He could have - and has - analyzed other meaning systems. But he draws a number of conclusions and one can draw some others that are specific for written fashion and relevant to fashion in

management ideas.

- Fashion is an example of a system that has become very autonomous in its meanings. It is a closed logic system with little connection to the outer world. One could call it an art form. Fashion is not the physical things. They are few and not very differentiated. Linen is linen, even if there is heavy fabric and light fabric. Fashion is the meaning that is put into these things. The language of fashion tend to lift the meaning away from the physical thing, "dissolve substances". "This denial (of the physical side) is perhaps the most profound function of the fashion system." (p. 279). Fashion is a narrative with its own logic undisturbed by very physical references.

- Part of this logic is that something is mentioned or noted in these texts (the second class of texts mentioned above). From the context and from reading it in a fashion magazine the reader knows that the noted item or feature is fashionable. This Barthes sees as the original, high status type of written fashion.

- The other type of logic is where some item or feature - ex cathedra - is pronounced good for (signifying) some external feature of the world. This sweater is for weekends. The plastic hairpins underline the youthful look. Here some feature of the world is connected arbitrarily with some dress item or feature of it. Arbitrarily, because next year the connection may be changed.

- In both cases, it is never mentioned that what is noted or connected has anything to do with fashion. The connections are objectified, reified - something "out there". The language is one of connections, reasons, what leads to what and occurrences in the world. Fashion is not presenting itself as a narrative. Fashion is never admitted and made relative as fashion but made objective and everlasting i.e. the arbitrariness is also denied.

- Finally, one can notice that management fashion and fashion in clothes resembles each other in having a physical side (the clothes, actual organizational activities, a meeting, for instance, or a piece of paper with measurable goals) and a verbal side (written fashion, writings about management methods). In both areas verbal descriptions are very important - fashion have to be explained. We cannot know that this style of skirt or this type of paper with certain words on is important if the fashion magazines, the fashion leaders and management discourse do not tell us. Written fashion is very widespread. Regarding clothes through the wide distribution of fashion magazines. Regarding management theory through magazines, books, conferences (with verbal presentations based on slides) etc.

4. Hypotheses regarding fashions in academic management research

In this final chapter I spell out what I have learned from the fashion texts in the form of a

number of hypotheses regarding the function of fashion in management research. As mentioned in the introduction this is done for two reasons. Firstly, to illustrate and exemplify the deeper theoretical understanding of fashion that emanates from the reading of the fashion texts. Secondly, to support the argument presented above that the Fashion Perspective can be seen as a fashion in itself. Instead of practicing on managers I feel it more fair to practice on my colleagues.

1. Fashion can be expected in all human activities and productions, including ideas such as ideas produced by academic management research (all).

Fashion is not limited to woman clothes or interior decoration. There are also political, artistic, intellectual and scientific fashions. The definition of fashion varies, as we have seen, between different authors. But two key elements are included in most definitions: 1) Fashion denotes something with a limited lifetime. Fashions have a life cycle. A birth, a growth phase, a popularity phase and a more or less sudden death. 2) Fashion has mainly non-technical functions. Fashion may be attached to items, e.g. clothes, that have technical functions. But the fashionable concerns mainly the non-technical - or even dysfunctional, following Veblen - aspects of items or ideas. The word "mainly" in the previous sentences refer to the fact that intellectual fashion, for instance, might have some technical functions, e.g. to enable us to see new aspects of a subject matter. But normally that could have been achieved with much less effort than what fashion demands.

It is already well established by the literature on fashion in management theory that there are fashions and fashion swings in popular management ideas. In the literature, I referred to above, Human Relations, Business Process Reengineering, Quality Management, Quality Circles, were, for instance, seen as fashions. Regarding, the last concept, Abrahamson presents nearly bell-shaped popularity curves (1999).

But also the non-popular, more academic type of management research has its fashions. Figure 1 (above) showed the popularity swings of the concept of "management fashion" and its equivalents. Even researchers in accounting, which I have had occasion to study (forthcoming study). In figure 2 (below) I show the results of a content analysis of the accounting journal Accounting, Organizations and Society (AOS). This journal was started in 1976 by the English professor Anthony Hopwood. It is one of the most respected accountancy journals, together with Journal of Accounting Research and The Accounting Review. The journal and Anthony Hopwood has been one of the main proponents of what is termed behavioral accounting.

For the analysis the relative frequency of four clusters of key words have been charted over time. The corpus consists of 642 articles from the start of the journal until the end of 1999. The analysis looked at the appearance of the key words in the abstract of the articles as found in ABI/Inform. The four clusters are:

- Motivation and Perception tradition. The "founding question" of behavioral accounting was

how human beings react to accountancy information. Words: "motivation", "perception".

· Marxian tradition. Words: "ideology", "power", "capitalistic", "work process", "labo(u)r process".

· Neo-institutional tradition. Words: "symbol", "signal", "institutional", "legitimacy", "rhetoric(s)".

· Foucault-social-construction tradition. Words: "discourse", "construction", "archaeology", "text", "language", "critical", "postmodern".

Note. The numbers are recalculated to show appearance pr. 100 articles in the period. They are then normalized so that all four clusters across the whole period from 1976 to 1999 are set as having the same share. This means that the curves only show relative differences in appearance between clusters and that the area below the curves is the same for all four clusters. The 1980 articles seem to be coded belonging to two adjacent periods, but the problem is negligible.

The curves show that the original behavioral accounting theme (motivation and perception) dominated the early years of the journal. But by 1986 these themes were dead. In the background new perspectives had grown, one of these being the Marxist perspective or at least the Marxist terminology. This "university Marxism" topped in the period 1991-1995 and then experienced a fast deroute. Marxian perspectives were discarded, irrespective of their possible technical value, as fast as long hair for men disappeared in the same period. Words connected with the neo-institutional school also topped by this time. The only group of words that do not level off are those connected with the Foucault and social construction tradition - words like "discourse" that we also saw suddenly come to use in Eric Abrahamssons article from 1999. This tradition seems to have taken over the "niche" - to use Abrahamssons expression - for exotic social theory references - that became vacant after the fall of (the Berlin Wall and) Marxist perspectives.

Are these examples of intellectual fashion? Yes. 1) They are short-lived. 2) They have no or little technical function. The theories of Marx and Foucault are different, but the way these theories are used in the ordinary management article, these differences are often reduced to use of different words. Instead of "ideology", the words "rhetorics" or "discourse" are used. There is no discussion of the implications. In the same way as we have seen the word "fashion" is used with only limited use of fashion theory.

2. Fashion should not be explained as the result of irrationalities or intellectual deficiencies of

the consumer (here: academic researcher), but as a rational pursuit of social and psychological benefits (all).

This is where the more popular parts of the Fashion Perspective go wrong.

3. Fashionable concepts that seem to require much work to master are preferred. Therefore foreign, non-English, difficult to understand concepts and references are used (Veblen).

A way to enhance the status of academic research is to make it look very difficult, theoretical advanced or exotic. In management research the use of exotic and for management not normal theory like Marx, Althusser, and Habermas (approximately 10 years ago, as we saw in figure 2) or Michel Foucault or the fashion concept (today) can be used as a sign that one is above the ordinary businessman and company employee.

4. References serve to signal that the author has got time and capacity to master strange and useless literature and concepts that are not necessary for the task at hand (Veblen).

5. Academic researchers/teachers use vicarious consumption in the form of their students who are trained to use the same form of conspicuous intellectual consumption when writing.

That this has to do with the employment situation and not real training becomes visible, when they go into employment in industry when they immediately change style (Veblen). They seem to be able to strip themselves of the fashionable intellectual garment and livery they had on in school and put on new concepts.

6. Fashionable concepts are used to signal that the author belongs to an envied in-group - the intellectual elite, the intelligentsia - above economic and commercial interests (Simmel).

7. Fashionable concepts are used to signal a distance to practitioners in management (consultants, managers) (Simmel).

8. Fashionable concepts are used especially strongly to differentiate the academic in-group from the group that is most similar and that provides the closest competition, namely the consultants (Simmel, König).

9. The use of fashionable concepts to distance the researchers from practitioners in management has grown because the status of the practitioners has risen relative to the status of academic researchers/teachers in management (Simmel, König).

Today an academic career in management research implies a relatively lower status than earlier compared to a career in industry. The wages are higher in industry jobs. This is reflected in a situation in Denmark, for instance, where it is difficult to recruit (male) Ph.D. students of high quality.

10. The groups in academia that are most likely to use fashionable concepts are lower status groups like the young, those under training including Ph.D. students, those professors who have not yet got tenure, women, and researchers/teachers in lower status subjects and in lower status institutions (Simmel, König).

It is interesting that Foucault has been especially popular among marketing and accounting researchers. "Perhaps, Foucault's greatest impact on our understanding of management and organization has been on critical studies of accounting", writes ((McKinlay and Starkey, 1998), p. 6). What does Foucault bring to accounting research that common sense did not know? That the knowledge of accounting and accounting practices aims at controlling the employees and having them behave in certain ways? That accounting implies to try to look at, control and examine many using as little manpower as necessary (the Panopticon metaphor)? That accounting uses special knowledge and a special language that gives power to those who know and which tends to define the world in a way that gives power to accountants? That management accounting when it is best will try to educate employees in economic consciousness so that they will be able to control themselves? Stripped of the in-words, there is nothing that would surprise any manager or accountant. One have to conclude that Foucault mainly brings status to lower status academic disciplines where the researchers feel further threatened by being compared to lay persons with a low status - accountants ("bean-counters") and advertising people, groups that are about the lowest an intellectual can think of.

11. The use of fashionable concepts allows the user to say strange or non-sensical things without feeling embarrassed or and having any unfavorable reaction from others (Simmel).

12. Management researchers deny - or at least do not discuss openly - that they are subject to intellectual fashion. But they assume - and discuss openly - that managers are subject to intellectual fashion (König, Barthes).

We saw in the analysis earlier in this article of selected Fashion Perspective texts how rare or non-existent reflections on the use of the fashion concept and other related concepts are. It is not described as a result of fashion and it is rarely discussed at all except for the ritual footnote "we do not mean it in a derogatory way".

13. The scenes where fashionable concepts become visible are scientific conferences and journal publication (König).

14. Fashionable concepts stimulates attention by increasing the " sex appeal" of articles (sex appeal = chance of making the authors intellectual genes survive). This together with their limited technical and intellectual function (hypothesis 1) means that the fashionable concepts are more likely to appear in visible parts rather than functional parts of articles, i.e. more often in titles and abstracts than in the body of text (König).

15. Fashionable concepts create their own autonomous world of meaning at a high, abstract and interpreted level. It represents a code system that is not dependent on the empirical world (Barthes).

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