



# Disseminating Drucker

## Knowledge, tropes and the North American management textbook

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to understand how Drucker's work has been disseminated through the North American management textbook since 1940, and what this tells people about the wider issue of the social construction and dissemination of management knowledge.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The paper is a critical hermeneutic analysis of the presence and use of Drucker in over 500 management textbooks and the socio-political context in which both Drucker's work and North American textbooks were written.

**Findings** – Paradoxically, while Drucker's work was found to be the most-referenced of any management writer in the textbooks studied, his theories – apart from discussions of "Management by objectives" and the "Knowledge economy" – were rarely discussed. It is argued that the referencing of Drucker served more to legitimize selected points made by textbook authors than to discuss and build on Drucker's work. Explanation of the paradox is explored through the socio-political contexts in which Drucker was writing, strongly suggesting that the North American textbook has developed a dominant scientific trope that construct business "knowledge" through the narrow lens of behavioural science.

**Originality/value** – While much writing can be found on the influence of Drucker on the business world and his status as a management guru, little is found on Drucker's body of work in the management textbook, which plays a key role in management education in North American business schools. The paper builds on recent management research on the role of socio-political context in the shaping of management theory and knowledge, and makes a new contribution to one's understanding of the shaping and contours of management knowledge.

**Keywords** North America, Education, Management gurus

**Paper type** Research paper

Peter Ferdinand Drucker ... is an US economist, management consultant, educator, and writer (born in Vienna), a professor of management ... He is widely known for his writings and lectures on management subjects, especially in the area of underlying philosophy of management and policy formulation. Perhaps his most widely quoted book is *The Practice of Management*, 1954 (Harper & Bros). His other works include: *The End of Economic Man*, 1939; *The Future of Industrial Man*, 1941; *Concept of the Corporation*, 1944; *The New Society*, 1950; *America's Next 20 years*, 1957; and *Landmarks of Tomorrow*, 1959 (Heyel, 1963a, p. 155).

The importance of Peter F. Drucker to the management discipline cannot be overstated. Indeed, he is credited by many, as having defined the role of the manager (Tarrant, 1976), invented the modern concept of management (Beatty, 1998), management by objectives (MBO) (Greenwood, 1981), and knowledge management (Cortada, 1998). While these claims may be open to argument, it is clear from our opening quote that by the onset of the 1960s Drucker's influence on management theory was noteworthy.



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Indeed, such has been the impact of Drucker's work that his influence has been discussed at length elsewhere. It is not our purpose here to revisit that influence (that is the subject of several other articles in this special issue) but rather to explore some of the socio-political processes through which such influence is created and through which management knowledge comes to be socially constructed. There is little doubt that Drucker was one of the earliest management educators to be labelled a management guru, or the gurus' guru (Prusak and Davenport, 2003). Drucker, however, complained that the term guru was a "hideous" modern-day replacement for the word charlatan (Jackson, 2001, p.10). Ironically, as we shall show, Drucker's work was often presented in ways that were simultaneously treated as important and somehow deeply flawed.

In studying the socio-political processes that helped to consolidate Drucker's place in management theory we use critical hermeneutics (Prasad, 2002) to explore how Drucker's paradigm has been disseminated through North American management textbooks. Our focus on textbooks builds on current research on the importance of the textbook in management education (Mills and Helms Hatfield, 1998), its role in the dissemination of selected ideas (Mills, 2004; McQuarie, 2005), the socio-political contexts in which they are produced (Genoe McLaren and Mills, 2008), and in the outcomes they produce (Dye *et al.*, 2005, Weatherbee *et al.*, 2008). In the latter regard we were struck by how a substantial corpus of work can be reduced to one or two simplistic artifacts (e.g. the treatment of Abraham Maslow whose many management publications are reduced to the ubiquitous triangle in the management textbook). In this paper we will add to that research by showing how Drucker's work has been treated in the same limited and hollow way, and without even the accompaniment of a diagrammatic artifact! As the textbook is normally a business student's initial exposure to the study of management, it holds an important position in the dissemination and use of management theory and research. The content to which students are exposed through the textbook becomes the foundation on which they base their practice of management when they are in the workplace.

In studying the "how" of the dissemination of Drucker's work in the management textbook we were also interested in "what" was being disseminated and what this told us about the social construction of management knowledge in general. The results, as we discuss in the following, were confirming yet surprising: Drucker's influence is confirmed in the fact that he is the highest-cited management educator in the 507 textbooks that we analyzed; surprising was the fact that, beyond reference to his influence on MBO and knowledge management, very few of his ideas are discussed and expanded on within textbooks. Thus, in many ways, Drucker suffers much the same fate as the treatment of Maslow and Lewin in the same medium (Dye *et al.*, 2005, Weatherbee *et al.*, 2008). Analysis of the socio-political contexts in which textbooks are produced suggests two main influences – one, the influence of the broader socio-political context (*viz* World War II, and the Cold War era) on the structuring of North American (i.e. US and Canadian) management textbooks and, two, the influence of the academy on the legitimacy of North American English speaking business education (specifically in the Depression era, and the early 1960s). Both cohered to shape accepted notions of business research as scientific, incremental, apolitical, ahistorical and geared to outcomes of efficiency and productivity to the neglect of broader social concerns (Burrell and Morgan, 1979).

Internal rules within something like the discourse of management education ... give legitimacy to specific management pundits such as Peter Drucker and Henry Mintzberg, and call for a rhetorical style that favors clarity and brevity over linguistic expressiveness or complexity (Prasad, 2005; p. 250-1).

A total of 507 management textbooks published mostly for the North American undergraduate academic market, spanning the years 1940 to 2008, were analyzed using critical hermeneutics: here we specifically followed the work of Prasad, 2002; Prasad and Mir, 2002, and his technique for making sense of business communications. The books form part of a collection that was acquired from various sources, including unsolicited publisher copies, discarded copies from colleagues, and numerous purchases from a variety of sources. We do not claim that these are a representative sample of management textbooks in use at any given time, but the collection does include a number of "best selling" texts and/or those written by prominent management educators, including former presidents of the Academy of Management (see Grant and Mills, 2006). The collection consists of textbooks written for students of human resources/personnel management, organizational behaviour, organization theory, management, or business. For ease of discussion we refer to these as management textbooks. Over 87 percent (462 books) were published in the USA, and aimed primarily at students in US business schools. The remaining 13 percent (67 books) were published solely for use in Canada. The textbooks from this collection have been used in a number of studies of management history (Mills and Helms Hatfield, 1998; Dye *et al.*, 2005; Grant and Mills, 2006; Genoe McLaren and Helms Mills, 2008; Genoe McLaren and Mills, 2008).

Of the 507 textbooks a search for references to Peter F. Drucker was conducted in those that were published since 1940 (following the publication of Drucker's first book in English, "The end of economic man"). This search yielded 223 texts that cited Drucker's work, and confirmed our expectations that textbooks were an important source for the dissemination of Drucker's work. In the second phase we undertook content analysis of those texts that cited Drucker to see how his works were being interpreted – which of his works were cited, how and why they were cited (i.e. what point was the author attempting to show?). After analyzing 80 randomly selected textbooks from the collection we were no longer finding novel uses of Drucker's work. We analyzed eight more textbooks to ensure that we had a representative sample of Drucker citations. We did not add any new data with those last eight textbooks, so we stopped at 88. We had reached "theoretical saturation", i.e. the same themes were recurring and not adding anything new to the analysis.

Next, using critical hermeneutics we analyzed the context of the extracted citations. Was there any difference, for example, between the ways Drucker was being cited in the 1950s from how he was being cited in the 1980s? Part of this process led us to examine the socio-political context for the period in which all the 507 textbooks in the collection were published. Here we were interested to see if the character and structure of the textbooks have changed significantly over time, especially in the period just prior to and during that when Drucker was involved in management education in the USA.

#### *Critical hermeneutic analysis*

Critical hermeneutic analysis is a method of exploring text that requires the researcher to simultaneously study both the text itself and the context, be that social, political, cultural,

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and/or historical, in which the text was written and has been, or still is, interpreted. The critical facet of the analysis comes into play as the researcher searches the text for illustration of ways that context influenced thinking at the time that the text was written and being interpreted, and what this tells us about the relationship between our own context and theorizing (Prasad and Mir, 2002). Here we build on our earlier approach (Genoe McLaren and Mills, 2008) and extend it to study of the dissemination of the work of Drucker. It is through this approach that we attempt to understand how the context in which the textbooks were written has influenced not only the nature and the extent of Drucker's presence in them but also the style of textbook production.

The critical hermeneutic analysis undertaken for this research was based on the four-stage process outlined by Prasad and Mir (2002) in their analysis of CEO letters to shareholders in the oil industry. In our analysis we focused on four periods that stood out as having affected the style and structure of textbook production – the pre-World War II era (1920-1940), World War II (1941-1945), the early Cold War (1945-1965), and the debates around higher education for business in the USA (late 1950s to early 1960s). From the analysis we draw wider implications about the development of management knowledge.

Throughout our analysis we also strove to maintain an awareness of our own embedded discourses and ideologies and how they were shaping our interpretations of the text under analysis (Prasad, 2005). As academics embedded in an institutionalized, academic business school, and located within a broad discourse of modernity, we were constantly challenged to question our assumptions about appropriate scholarship, pedagogy, and the role of the textbook. These challenges helped us to seek greater understandings of the contexts in which both the textbooks were produced and Drucker was writing.

### Drucker in the management textbook

Drucker insists: "The social centre of gravity has shifted to the knowledge worker. All developed societies are becoming . . . knowledge societies" (1990, p. 167). That such pieties might seem a revelation, as Drucker intends, is an ironical indictment of the era of modernist management that Taylor (1911) formally inaugurated with his *Scientific Management* (Clegg and Hardy, 1996, p. 684).

Most of the 88 textbooks analysed for this paper have between two and ten Drucker references, with some having as many as 22 (e.g. McFarland, 1974). The earliest citations appear in Koontz and O'Donnell's, 1955 *Principles of Management: An Analysis of Managerial Functions*, and include references to Drucker's *Concept of the Corporation* (1946) and his *Fortune* article on "The function of profits" (Drucker, 1949).

Drucker is the most cited management writer in the textbooks, exceeding that of Abraham Maslow, Max Weber, and Frank and Lillian Gilbreth, both in terms of the number of textbooks and the number of references cited within each textbook. This is probably not surprising for the man who Prusak and Davenport (2003) found to be the fourth most influential management thinker, and the topmost guru among the management gurus. Drucker's *The Practice of Management* (1954) and *Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices* (1973) are the most cited of his works in the selected textbooks, but we found reference to over 34 different books and articles. There were also a significant number of allusions to Drucker without any accompanying source for the reference; for example, Robbins and Langton (2001) state that "Drucker used to

advocate teamwork for all organizations but that he now preaches that leaders are everything”, yet no source for this attribution is given.

Nonetheless, despite the high number of citations to Drucker in management textbooks the content of his work is barely discussed. The two exceptions are his work on management by objectives (MBO) and, to a much less extent, the knowledge economy. Even here, textbook discussion and representation of these concepts are different from Drucker’s original ideas and appear years after Drucker introduced them. Citation of Drucker’s other work, while numerous, have very little consistency or commonality. This can be compared with the breadth of issues discussed in *The Essential Drucker* (Drucker, 2001), which go well beyond MBO and the knowledge economy. Drucker has described the purpose of *The Essential Drucker* as an introduction to management, yet the bulk of its content does not appear in the undergraduate management textbooks of our study. We believe that the discourses in which the management textbooks are written play a role in the way that Drucker traverses the textbook into undergraduate management courses.

#### *Management by objectives*

MBO, as described by Drucker (1954), is a management philosophy in which a manager’s performance is measured by the contribution he or she makes to the success of an organization. Managers must be able to see the business as a whole and understand what is required of them in order to contribute to the business goals. Their objectives will be derived from those goals and set by the individual managers themselves (Drucker, 1954). Credited by Drucker as being first used by Alfred Sloan at General Motors, MBO was further developed by Drucker and Harold Smiddy and first published by Drucker in 1954 (Tarrant, 1976; Greenwood, 1981). Yet we note two important responses to Drucker’s work. First, there was a time lag of 15 years before MBO appeared in business textbooks[1] – the first reference to MBO did not appear until 1969, but was attributed to Harrington Emerson (in Steiner, 1969)[2]. It was in 1971 that Harold Koontz discussed MBO and credited Drucker with being its catalyst, and it was not until the mid-1970s that MBO acquired a significant textbook presence (Yaney, 1975; Filley *et al.*, 1976; Gibson *et al.*, 1976; Hellriegel and Slocum, 1976; Trewatha and Newport, 1976; Magnusen, 1977; Massie and Douglas, 1977). Second, over the years, MBO has become less about understanding and working towards the overall success of the organization, and more about managing by results (Tarrant, 1976). This is very similar to finding about the reinterpretation of Lewin’s (Mills *et al.*, 2002) and Maslow’s (Cooke *et al.*, 2005) theories over time.

A review of the literature indicates that MBO started appearing in academic journals in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Tosi, 1965; Tosi and Carroll, 1968; Carvalho, 1972) but only after empirical research. That research included a longitudinal investigation by Ivancevich into the effects of MBO published in 1972. He studied two medium-sized organizations that had implemented MBO through an external-change agent and found the effects of the MBO training and implementation to be short-lived.

Once deemed acceptable for academic publication, MBO developed a significant presence in the North American management textbook. MBO was discussed in 26 of the 88 selected textbooks that cited Drucker, and in 13 of 30 textbooks selected randomly from those that did not include specific reference to Drucker. The pattern of discourse in the textbook of the late 1970s through the 1990s reveals the philosophy proselytized by

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Drucker as developing from a method of management developed by Drucker into an unquestioningly accepted but un-apportioned key concept of management.

*The knowledge economy*

Drucker is credited with popularizing the idea of knowledge work in management theory (Cortada, 1998). Yet, as with his notion of MBO, it was almost 20 years before the management textbook paid any attention to his ideas on knowledge work.

Drucker began discussing the knowledge worker, with reference to executives as knowledge workers in *The Effective Executive* (1966). In “The age of discontinuity” (1968) Drucker discussed in detail the emergence of knowledge workers as the single largest group of workers, and his belief that the knowledge worker came before the knowledge job. He goes on to state the importance of learning how to obtain economic performance from knowledge and the social and psychological needs of the knowledge worker. The knowledge worker and the knowledge society become recurring themes throughout Drucker’s work.

In the management textbooks studied, discussion of knowledge work first appeared in Davis and Newstrom’s *Human Behavior at Work: Organizational Behavior* (1985), with a reference to Drucker’s *The Age of Discontinuity* (1968). Moving forward in time, discussion of Drucker’s notion of the knowledge society can be found in eight of the 88 textbooks, including Rosenfeld and Wilson (1999) who gave the greatest coverage to knowledge work and discussed the power shift to employees in the knowledge society, the increasing demand for the knowledge worker, and predictions that organizations of the future will be knowledge-based.

When Drucker introduced the idea of the knowledge society it was as a set of ideas and predictions about changes that would occur within organizations. The actual management of the work and the workers was still surrounded by questions (Drucker, 1968). However, although he popularized the idea of the knowledge society in his writings, Drucker was not the progenitor of the concepts. Research into knowledge work first appeared in the late 1950s when Fritz Machlup, a professor of economics, coined the term “knowledge industries” and conducted a significant body of initial analytical work (Cooke *et al.*, 2005). Machlup and other researchers in the field of knowledge work were from various disciplines, including economics, biology, and psychology, but it was Drucker who introduced the notion into management (Cortada, 1998). Drucker rarely set out to provide tangible solutions or specific answers to management problems (Drucker, 1973; Tarrant, 1976) and the fact that behavioural researchers still find the topic fraught with operational problems and problems of how to define knowledge work (Kelloway and Barling, 2000) may help to explain why the topic has received limited discussion in even the modern management textbook.

**Context, legitimacy and the management textbook**

The behavioural sciences include any science that studies the behavior of man . . . in their physical and social environment, by methods of experiment and observations in the manner of other natural sciences (Heyel, 1963a, p. 50).

Scientific management was not an “invention”. It was a discovery of the use of the application of the scientific method of attack on a new set of problems (Heyel, 1963b, p. 866).

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Our analysis of numerous textbooks revealed a paradox. On the one hand, Drucker was immensely popular, as revealed through the fact that he was more cited than most other management writers. On the other hand, his work and the other management theories they disseminated was rarely explored or developed by textbook authors. To make sense of this we engaged in detailed content analysis of the rhetoric used to represent Drucker's work, and a critical hermeneutic study of the context in which Drucker's work was evaluated. Content analysis revealed that Drucker's work was used not so much as scientific evidence but, rather, as legitimization of such evidence. In critical hermeneutic study we found that the socio-political context in which management and management textbooks developed served at one time to privilege management as a philosophy and at others to marginalize philosophy in favour of scientific accounts and presentation. In the early stages of Drucker's career, textbook characterization of management as a philosophy favoured the broad sweeping accounts that became Drucker's popular trademark while an increasing emphasis on "scientific", applied, and value free (objectivist) accounts, during the latter part of Drucker's career, were less amenable to Drucker's style of writing. We might then ask, why was it that Drucker's work was so highly cited?

*Drucker as a source of legitimacy*

Aside from discussion of MBO and knowledge workers, the citations to Drucker in the management textbooks have no discernable consistency or pattern. Over thirty-four different books and articles have been cited by management textbook authors which range the gamut of Drucker's works. The textbook authors cited Drucker for very different purposes. Citation to Drucker's *The Practice of Management* (1954), for example, are used to argue that the real manager is always an innovator (Dale, 1965), that the profit motive is relatively useless for organizational planning and direction (Litterer, 1965), and that the leadership of General Motors exemplified leadership excellence (Davis and Filley, 1965). Four textbooks from 1999 cite nine different Drucker publications, with only *Post-Capitalist Society* (Drucker, 1993) being cited more than once. Here the authors drew on Drucker's work in discussion of knowledge work (Schwind *et al.*, 1999), discussed MBO (Robbins and Langton, 1999), information-based organization (Falkenberg *et al.*, 1999), the power shifts in the knowledge society, peoples' low tolerance for change, corporate responsibility, increasing demand for the knowledge worker, outmoded managerial activities, the importance managerial career mobility, knowledge-based organizations of the future, and management creativity and innovation (Rosenfeld and Wilson, 1999). Between 1965 and 1999 it is rare to find any sort of in-depth discussion of Drucker's ideas and their value to, or impact on, the management discipline.

There is a certain irony in the fact that our findings show Drucker (1954) to be the most cited management thinker in the management textbook, as he himself rarely cited others within his own work. Drucker trusted that his readers would be "more concerned with what is right than with who is right and, accordingly, are neither assuaged by appeal to authority nor alarmed by its absence" (pviii). Beatty (1998) commented on reviewers' complaints about the dearth of footnotes in Drucker's work and wondered how Drucker knew everything that he wrote. In Beatty's opinion, the rare occasions when Drucker provided footnotes, the references are enough to shrivel skepticism about the legitimacy of Drucker's work. With his lack of supporting

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references and no scholarly empirical research after *Concept of the Corporation* (1946), Drucker's body of work has stood outside the growing scientific academic discourse. According to Beatty (1998), university professors said that they do not assign Drucker's readings in their classes because Drucker based his works on his own ideas, not on empirical research. Nonetheless, and somewhat paradoxically, many textbook authors cited Drucker in support of their own scientific work. The process of legitimization occurs through various rhetorical devices (reference here please unless you meant the process of legitimization of Drucker occurs through various rhetorical devices), with Drucker being referred to as a "top management scholar" (Greenberg *et al.*, 2000), a "management guru" (Stone and Meltz, 1993), a "noted management thinker" (Greenlaw and Biggs, 1979), and "an outstanding contemporary spokesman in the management field" (Wheeler, 1962, p. 210). Unreferenced quotes from his work are included, often with a simple "Drucker says", as if his name requires no introduction and is enough to give legitimacy to what is being said (do you need an example here?). Drucker, who thought that the ideas were more important than the person who had them, is present in the management textbook not through those very ideas that managers deem so incredibly crucial to their effectiveness, but through his name as a source of authority and legitimacy.

#### *Management theory, philosophy, and the textbook*

In an attempt to make sense of Drucker's presence in the management textbooks, we reviewed events in the development of management theory and textbook production over time. It is through these events, and their impact on the structure and content of the management textbook, that we can begin to understand the influence of the socio-political context on Drucker's (and other theorists) presence in business education (Cooke, 1999; Kelley *et al.*, 2006).

The specific periods that we chose to explore for their potential impact on both the management textbook and Drucker's presence in it are the inter-war era (1920-1940), World War II (1941-1945), the early Cold War period (1945-1965), and the debates around higher education for business in the USA at the end of the 1950s and early 1960s. These periods were selected because they encompass critical periods in the development of management theory and business education in North America or the western hemisphere (Cooke *et al.*, 2005). As has been argued elsewhere (Cooke *et al.*, 2005; Grant and Mills, 2006), management theory and business education developed during these periods and were arguably influenced by the socio-political context of the times in North America (Mills and Helms Hatfield, 1998).

#### *From pre- to post-World War II*

Detailed analysis of the pre-World War II textbook and the associated management theorists reveal the emergence of a field whose practitioners saw themselves as management philosophers. Indeed, in the late 1930s, when a small group of like-minded management educators set out to establish the Academy of Management in North America they specifically set out to recruit from the ranks of those who saw management as a new philosophy (Grant and Mills, 2006). In an associated view, many of the textbooks of the day rooted themselves in discussions of management as an art and as a philosophy despite the growth and popularity of scientific management. As such, most of the textbooks of the pre-war era are far reaching in their discussion of the

role of management and the manager in modern capitalist society, reflecting the types of socio-political concerns linking management with society as found in the work of Mayo (1933) and his Hawthorne colleagues (Roethlisberger and Dickson, 1939), Burnham (1941) and Peter F. Drucker's *The End of Economic Man* (1939). The textbooks of the time also reflected on other aspects of management and society (e.g. unemployment) and such things as the role of legislation and labour unions. In several pre-war texts big business was seen as something to be questioned rather than applauded and senior managers were sometimes treated with suspicion. In this context Drucker's support for unions and his counseling of big business and senior managers to become responsible social leaders resonated with several of the management texts of the day (see Drucker's *The Future of Industrial Man*), not to mention the tenor of the closing depression/new deal era.

In terms of writing style, many of the pre-war textbooks contained limited referencing and indexing, a trend that carried into the early North American Academy of Management conference proceedings and journal publications (Grant and Mills, 2006).

The war years saw a tremendous shift in the focus and emphasis of management thought as government expectations and funding flowed into behavioural research and required incremental, value-free, results-driven research with proven and immediate outcomes (Robin, 2001). This trend would have a major impact on the development of management theory in the post-war era that would be accelerated by the onset of the cold war and a dramatic change in the way that business education was taught in North American/western hemisphere universities (Robin, 2001, Abella, 2008).

The academic context of the 1920s and 1930s that developed the management theorists whose work encompassed broad subject areas and placed low value on referencing was the same context in which Drucker began to develop his theories of management. We can see similarities between Drucker's work and the work of the early management theorists. Drucker often introduced ideas from other disciplines into his management work, for example, his adoption of the idea of knowledge work from economics (Drucker, 1968). As the discipline of management moved into a more scientific and applied mode, Drucker did not move with it.

#### *The management textbook and the Cold War era*

The "managerial revolution" (Burnham, 1941), in the post-war era was the impetus for the development in North America of management theory as a field independent of the traditional business disciplines such as economics and accounting (Drucker, 1973). As management theory developed and gained acceptance, so too did an associated academic curriculum. The years following World War II showed an influx of students to North American universities, with business becoming the most popular undergraduate major by 1955 (Cheit, 1985), and growth of North American textbook publication followed suit. The development of management as a discipline, the managerial role, and the business school curriculum at that time were heavily influenced by the early years of the Cold War (Cooke, 1999, Cooke *et al.*, 2005, Grant and Mills, 2006; Genoe McLaren and Mills, 2008). If World War II had spurred the drive for behaviourist and applied research in management, the Cold War had infused that drive with a particular ideology (Whitfield, 1991; Robin, 2001) that was in essence anti-union, pro-corporatist and pro-big business (Grant and Mills, 2006). The academic

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community was, on the whole, more cautious about scholarly pursuits that appeared to critique the profit motive and the role of big business, support unions and any move to employment equity (Schrecker, 1986; Horowitz, 1998).

Thus, the Cold War can be argued to have had at least two major effects on direction of management theory. On the one hand there was continued behavioural research, with considerable levels of government funding backing this research (Robin, 2001; Abella, 2008) in an economic framework geared to a new form of warfare (Davis, 1952). At the same time the internal US cold war or “McCarthyism”, which was waged (1945 to 1965) which took the form of many investigative committees, discouraged educators from discussing controversial issues (Cooke, 1999, Runte and Mills, 2006). Leading educators, including the editor of the Harvard *Business History Review*, found themselves dismissed by their universities for failure to comply with investigative committees (Schrecker, 1994).

Both trends are seen in the North American management textbooks up to the end of the 1960s. There was an increasing tendency to cast management theory as a science and a dramatic reduction in the extent to which broader social issues are discussed, including social issues, trade unions, race, gender, and even the cold war itself (Mills and Helms Hatfield, 1998). Within this framework Drucker’s writings occupied a style of writing that fitted uneasily in the emerging style (or trope) of textbook expression. His argument that the negative reputation of big business needed to be addressed through socially responsible management (Drucker, 1942), although not out of tune with cold war concerns, may have looked similar – both in the sweep of the argument and its focus – to leftist and liberal ways of thinking.

It was during these years of academic fear that the foundation was laid for a management curriculum and the management textbook in North America. Capitalism, rationality, and organizational efficiency, the fundamentals of capitalism, had to be supported at all costs if the cold war was to be won. Curriculum was developed and textbooks were written with a narrow focus and an avoidance of socio-political context in part to avoid any accusations of communist (or even “liberal” leanings (Schrecker, 1994). What resulted were management textbooks that excised theory from practice, legitimized a capitalist and managerialist view of the business world, and brooked no questioning of organizational power and control (Mills and Helms Hatfield, 1998). In this context, Drucker’s work would have appeared anachronistic with their lack of scientific rigour and their broad concerns with the social implications of business. The fear created in US academic institutions by the Cold War communist witch-hunt, and the associated conformist and managerialist business curriculum and textbooks that resulted, may have resulted in textbook authors being loathe to include new and untested concepts in their books Mills and Helms Hatfield, 1998; Schrecker, 1994).

#### *The shift in business education in the USA*

Socio-political attention in higher education began to shift to the role of business education in post-World War II USA. In 1948 the Ford Foundation established a committee to look into the matter, with a view to achieve the “improvement of the structure, procedures, and administration of (the USA) economic organizations: business firms, industries, labor unions, and others” (Carroll, 1959, p. 155). This eventually led to a three-year study, the results of which were published as the Gordon and Howell Report (1959). A parallel study was commissioned by the Carnegie

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Corporation – *The Education of American Businessmen* (Pierson, 1959). Both studies found fault with university business education for its lack of direct relevance to careers in business, the quality of its students, and its lack of scholarly research. The major recommendations included a call for business research to move away from descriptions of practice and norms towards the development of challenging hypotheses, scientific research techniques and a focus on behavioural science. The curriculum had to move away from vocational courses towards an emphasis on functional areas of business (e.g. marketing, labour relations, and finance) – directions that Drucker did not fit into easily. Both studies, however, encouraged greater exposure of business students to a broad liberal arts education and the broader contexts in which management operated – concerns to which Drucker’s work did speak.

The two reports notwithstanding, what we see reflected in the subsequent development of post-1960 textbooks was the emergence of a new trope built around behaviourist research and techniques and functional areas of business. This focus on quantitative and behavioural sciences resulted in the hiring of faculty who were mathematicians, sociologists, and psychologists, in contrast to people with training or backgrounds in business (Wren, 2005). Drucker’s work, based as it was on his experience working with organizations, was not in some quarters deemed academically rigorous research (Beatty, 1998), and Drucker in turn “condemned the often sterile research output of the academics” (Wren, 2005, p. 425).

Not all of the recommendations of the reports were followed. The focus of North American business schools was so strongly set on a functional view of management as independent of management’s broader context that the suggestions by Gordon and Howell (1959) and Pierson (1959) to include broad liberal arts and context in a business education were often ignored. Since Drucker’s work had always been, and would continue to be, based on a broader scope than the clearly defined techniques and “action lists” developed from functional behavioural research, Drucker’s work was ignored by management researchers and not developed in management textbooks. Drucker’s work, which he wrote in order to stimulate readers into thinking (Tarrant, 1976), did not fit into the standard and accepted structure of a management textbook that was primarily developed during the early cold war years and remains in use today.

### **Conclusion**

One of Drucker’s greatest contributions to the field of management was his ability to search out, understand, and apply theories from disciplines other than management and determine how they best applied to management, and to encourage consideration of the broader role of management to society. In that regard he was ahead of his time. He is the guru of the management gurus (Prusak and Davenport, 2003). Through our research we found him to be the most cited author in the management textbook. Yet his ideas, the content of his work, do not have a significant presence in the management textbook aside from MBO and the knowledge society.

Drucker only briefly fit with the academic discourse of his time, prior to stepping away from both his political science and economics roots in order to write *Concept of the Corporation* (1946). He was warned at the time that he would be destroying his career in academia forever by writing about a topic that had no respectability and was not based in any existing field of knowledge (Beatty, 1998). Drucker did not work in the

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accepted, and expected, academic style of empirical research that came to dominate the academic journals of the western hemisphere in the post-World War II era academic world. He did not reference his sources in his publications. Specific to the management textbook, Drucker spoke in ideas, theories, and philosophies, not tools, solutions, and specific answers to individual questions. His work did not translate into the textbook formula created during the Cold War. There is a certain irony in the fact that the main body of Drucker's work, although "available" to wider audiences, was generally denied a place in the education of future managers because it did not match the conventions of an increasingly dominant behavioural trope within the North American textbook.

Our analysis of Drucker and his presence in the management textbook illustrates to us, as management researchers and educators, the influence of socio-political context on what we study and what we teach. It suggests that we need to examine more closely the development of tropes that serve as dominant filters for management knowledge or, more accurately, what is to count as management "knowledge" Use of the ideologically conservative aspect of the behavioural trope has served to obscure and neglect many theories that arose from socially conscious efforts to improve society. Much of Kurt Lewin's work and that of his colleagues involved in the development of Action Research, for example, was originally geared to challenging discrimination and building participation (Cooke, 1999, 2006) but those origins and applications all but disappeared from the North American management textbook. The objectivist aspect of the behavioural trope, at least until recently, has served to obscure a range of important studies not least of which was Abraham Maslow's work on sexuality, culture and a range of issues long overlooked (Dye *et al.*, 2005). More than most, textbook representations of Peter F. Drucker's many ideas reveal the problem of dominant tropes that are rarely if ever questioned. Drucker was certainly no Marxist or leftist writer but much of what he had to say, including his observations on the need for socially responsible management, was left unsaid or undeveloped in the management textbook. This is not a plea for a privileging of certain types of management knowledge but rather a simultaneous celebration of alternative tropes (White, 1985) in the constitution of management knowledge and a call for the problematization of management knowledge to allow greater debate and the kind of creative thinking favoured by Drucker.

### Notes

1. Interestingly, references to "The practice of management" first appeared in 1960 but without reference to MBO.
2. The 1979 edition of Steiner credits Drucker as creating MBO.

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