**Evans, C. And Holmes, L. (2013) *Re-Tayloring Management. Scientific Management a Century on.* Farnham: Gower.**

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There is evidence of an increasing antipathy towards history within management education. A scan of today’s management textbooks reveals that typically, little space is devoted to management’s history. Seemingly, students want to learn about how to manage in the present and the future – not about how it was done in the past (Cummings & Bridgman, 2011). In the words of one leading textbook author: “students want to know what works and what doesn’t…they are not interested in the details of research, the historical evolution of our knowledge, or long discourses on competing ideas” (Robbins, 1997, xvii).

It is pleasing then, when books are written that engage with management’s defining ideas and critically evaluate their continued relevance. *Re-Tayloring Management* marks the passing of a century since F.W Taylor’s *The Principles of Scientific Management* (1911). Most readers of this journal will be familiar with Taylor’s systematic, ‘one-best way’ approach to management organised around scientific principles: developing a science of work; the separation of conception from execution; the scientific selection, training and development of workers; and the provision of incentives to develop co-operation with workers.

*Re-Tayloring Management* sets out to assess the extent to which these principles are evident in today’s organisations. Contemporary managerial discourse is dominated by talk of ‘engagement’ and ‘empowerment’, but is management still driven by Taylor’s obsession for efficiency and control? The reader is given an answer on the first page of Christina Evans and Leonard Holmes’ introduction: “The ‘ghost of Taylor’ is still very much alive…contemporary knowledge workers are just as constrained by Taylor’s principles of scientific management as the industrial workers that Taylor studied in the early twentieth century” (p.1).

The book is comprised of an introductory chapter by the editors, followed by three parts. Part 1 aims to place Taylor’s principles of management in historical context. Colin Hales begins by highlighting Taylor’s importance to ‘management’ as a field of study, he being the first to articulate a systematic approach to the co-ordination and control of work. Hales introduces a ‘medical metaphor’ for analysing the relationship between Taylor’s principles of management and the wider management movement. They are a ‘stem cell’ from which management approaches have grown; a ‘pathogen’ for which treatments and cures have been sought and a ‘fatal remedy’ – the idea that managers, who gained power and control from the application of scientific management, are increasingly subjected to its gaze. Hales provides a well-written overview of Taylor’s principles of management and usefully distinguishes between these principles, their immediate adoption as ‘Taylorism’, their adaption and extension into ‘scientific management’ and rationalized management, a set of approaches inspired by Taylor’s philosophy. These important distinctions are missed by some of the book’s other contributors, resulting in an unfortunate construction of Taylor as ‘bogeyman’.

In the following chapter Huw Morris compares the rapid spread and greater influence of Taylorism in the US with the reluctance of UK businesses to embrace his principles. The reasons, Morris argues, were the relative strength of UK craft and guilds organizations, a greater concern by UK employers and managers for employee morale and the delayed development of business schools and consultancies in the UK – institutions which disseminated Taylor’s ideas. On the question of Taylor’s continued influence, Morris concludes that ideas such as total quality management, business process re-engineering and lean production are descendants of Taylorism and are increasingly applied beyond the manufacturing sector to the service sector.

This shift becomes the focus of Part II of the book, exploring Taylor’s legacy in the service and knowledge economy. There is a strong UK-emphasis here, which is understandable given that nine of the eleven contributors to the volume have a connection with the University of Roehampton, but perhaps unfortunate, given the application of scientific management in so many diverse contexts around the world. Judith Glover looks at the case of hybrid worker in the UK’s information and communication technologies sector. Hybrid work combines technical and soft skills, making it difficult to standardize along Taylorist lines. The downside of the difficulty in classifying the skills of hybrid workers, argues Glover, is that their career advancement is restricted.

In the following chapter, Tony Cutler explores connections between Taylorism and New Public Management (NPM), identifying similarities between the ‘systematic soldiering’ which Taylor sought to eradicate (the calculated efforts by workers to produce far less than they are capable of) and the practice of ‘gaming’ under NPM, where ‘targets’ are manipulated to satisfy oversight bodies. A difference, notes Cutler, is that unlike Taylorism, NPM does not offer a ‘one best way’ to achieve these targets.

Part 2 ends with Christopher Bond and Darren O’Byrne’s passionate critique of the impact of Taylor’s ideas on UK higher education. Starting with the familiar refrain ‘if it moves, measure it’, they argue that “nowhere is this uncritical acceptance of a thinly disguised scientific management more evident than in the field of higher education in the UK” (p.137). Their application of Taylor’s principles of task specification and division of labour to today’s universities will resonate with many readers of this journal.

A refreshing departure from the UK context is provided by Shuchi Sinha and Yiannis Gabriel in their study of four call-centres in India. They follow the general thrust of the volume in concluding that despite the introduction of team-working and flexible working, the obsession with control through monitoring and performance measurement remains. The study gives an interesting insight into the stressful nature of call-centre work, especially the rejection, discrimination and abuse that these Indian workers receive in their interactions with Western customers.

In the concluding chapter, Evans and Holmes draw together the elements of continuity and change explored throughout the book. What continues is the mistaken belief that management is a rational activity, the preoccupation of management to discipline and control workers, and the scientific selection of workers – although in today’s service work it is more about ‘cultural fit’ than being physically fit.

*Re-Tayloring Management* is a thoughtful collection of studies and reflections on the continued relevance of scientific management. It is pitched at a broad audience of academics, postgraduate students, and, surprisingly in our view, professional managers. The book aims to appeal to “the ‘curious’ management practitioner seeking something different from traditional management texts’ (p.5). It wants practitioners to be “more reflexive about what constitutes effective management in different contexts, rather than opting for the universalist one best way of managing, which Taylor clearly believed was the case” (p.5). This is a laudable objective, but we expect the book will most likely appeal to management and organization scholars associated with critical management studies and labour process theory, as well as their postgraduate students.

*Re-Tayloring Management* is a valuable contribution to the literature on management’s history and its relevance for today. Given that it adopts both historical and critical perspectives, we were hoping for more of a critical historical analysis, to address in greater depth questions such as: Why did these ideas become popular in Taylor’s time? Why was Taylor identified as scientific management’s central figure? Why is scientific management considered as the origin of ‘management’?

Taylor’s writing on efficiency was relatively unknown until 1910, when progressive US lawyer Louis Brandeis coined the term ‘scientific management’ in public hearings on proposed railroad freight increases before the Interstate Commerce Commission. Brandeis argued the increases were unreasonable because the railroads were inefficiently run and said savings of at least one million dollars a day were possible. This sparked public interest in the new methods, and Taylor stepped somewhat reluctantly into the spotlight.

Brandeis believed that “the greater productivity of labor must not only be attainable, but attainable under conditions consistent with the conservation of health, the enjoyment of work, and the development of the individual” (cited in Kraines, 1960: 196) . This required, Brandeis argued, a strong organized labour movement, which would lead to co-operation in eliminating waste and conserving resources. Brandeis’ *Scientific Management and the Railroads (1911)* is largely forgotten when the history of management is written. This is unfortunate because if aware of his contribution, we might evaluate scientific management and its relevance for today differently.

For the most part, the contributors to *Re-Tayloring Management* lament Taylor’s continued influence over the world of work, encouraging practitioners to be more reflexive and to resist the prescriptive appeal of Taylor’s writing. Perhaps though, an effect of books such as this is to keep the unfortunate ‘ghost’ of Taylor alive. As Roper (1999) has argued, both Taylor’s ‘disciples’ and his ‘debunkers’ collude in constructing him as the ‘founding father’ of management. It suits both groups to distil from the complexity of what actually happened a simple and engaging narrative about the influence of one great or evil man, depending on your point of view.

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