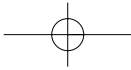# Part I

Understanding the significance of management development

Despite the intense interest in the development of managers and leaders and a good deal of research over recent decades, the field remains ripe for enquiry with many vexing questions still unresolved. How can managerial capability be benchmarked and to what extent can productivity at a national or organizational level be linked to the calibre of managers and leaders? Cultivating leadership talent is expensive and time-consuming for employers; the opportunity costs can also be high, design lead-times can be lengthy and the time-lagged effects difficult to determine. Given this, how confident are we that such resource allocation is worthwhile? Individual investment can be considerable too; participants frequently make personal sacrifices to update their expertise and develop their professional capability and training activities often involve high stretch and risk. Do the rewards outweigh the costs? Management development programmes are often used as a device to reduce discriminatory attitudes and improve diversity in organizations; yet it is not unusual to find such development actually exacerbating inequality in the workplace.

All this begins to suggest that at least some of the significance attached to management and leadership development may lie elsewhere than in its performance impact or personal utility. Perhaps, for example, the potency of such activities is more to do with the way precious resources are being allocated, the way corporate messages are being disseminated, the way ideologies and ethical stances are receiving reinforcement or being undermined, the way managerial identities are being forged and so on. In the first chapter we attempt to create some reflexive space in order to explore these differing conceptions of management development. We argue that *discourse* is peculiarly suited for this kind of analysis, and the rest of the book dips into a range of discourses to illuminate some of the fascinating facets of management and leadership development interventions. Each reveals something different, surprising and occasionally disturbing about such programmes and events. Furthermore some of the discourses sit very uncomfortably alongside each other; it is perhaps for this reason that they are rarely compared or considered in the same piece of writing. Yet for us, the real challenge and excitement in writing this book has been to wrestle with the contradictions and conundrums that arise when trying, both systematically and faithfully, to inhabit

these contrasting views of the world. Before we embark on this, given that the title of the book refers to the development of both managers and leaders, we need to explore what is inferred by these labels. This we address in chapter two, as well as sketching in the shifting borders between management development and its neighbouring fields of management education, management training and management learning.
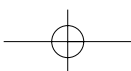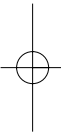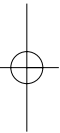
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Management development: paradox, reflexivity and discourse

The university stands for things that are forgotten in the heat of battle, for values that get pushed aside in the rough and tumble of everyday living, for the goals we ought to be thinking about and never do, for the facts we don't like to face, and the questions we lack the courage to ask. (Gardner, 1968: 90)

After reading this chapter you will be able to:

- **Explain a number of reasons why the study of management development is important**
- **Describe the related notions of reflexivity and discourse in relation to the study of management development**
- **Use these twin notions to critically appraise the reasons for studying management development**
- **Explain the virtue of discourses for analyzing and understanding management development, compared to that of frames or paradigms**
- **Distinguish the key features of four Grand Discourses of management development**
- **Understand the structure and rationale for the book**

Introduction

This first chapter may not be quite what you expect. We firmly believe that a fresh analysis of the concept and practice of management development is overdue and we give some reasons as to why this is the case. However, in doing so it becomes apparent that there is more to management development than initially meets the eye. Certainly it is a potent and high-profile human resource (HR) activity, involving some of the organization's key players and attracting high investment both in terms of corporate budgets and expectations. For this reason alone, management development deserves sustained scrutiny. But as a 'project', management development also attracts a wide range of reaction from those touched by its programmes, activities and associated techniques and trappings. And such experiential accounts often reveal much that is unanticipated, paradoxical and contentious about development interventions, well intentioned or otherwise. It is also evident that, far from being a value-neutral instrument for upgrading skills or changing attitudes, few if any management development activities are devoid of moral assumptions and ethical consequences. Taking this a step

further, it is not difficult to see how such activities can be used as a tool to emancipate and release talent on the one hand, but also as means to control and suppress difference on the other. If we acknowledge the possibility that these different 'readings' of management development exist and matter, then we also require a means of analysis that allows these contrasting interpretations to be explored. It is for this reason that in this chapter we propose a multi-discourse approach. The advantage of this approach is that it allows us, in the spirit of the Gardner quote at the start of the chapter, to examine management development in all its intriguing facets. Among the questions which we seek to answer in this book are:

- Why do some management development activities lead to the opposite of what was intended (e.g. conformity rather than creativity, discrimination rather than diversity, scepticism rather than inspiration, individualism rather than team-working)?
- Why is management development often obsessed with 'getting it right' as against learning from getting it wrong? Who defines what is 'right' and what is 'wrong' in the first place, on what basis and with what motives?
- What does the language associated with management development achieve and what does it frequently omit, obscure, conceal and distort?
- Why is management development typically preoccupied with programmes and events rather than the developmental space between them?
- Why do efforts to improve workplace performance often remove the manager from his/her everyday context?
- Why does so much management development stress the importance of collective collaboration, yet employ methods that focus uniquely on the individual?
- Despite the presence of overt or stated objectives, why does management development sometimes feel like a game with unwritten rules?
- Why is there so little in the way of serious attempts to evaluate management development?
- Why does there continue to be so much investment in management development when its promise remains so often unfulfilled?
- When the dust has settled who are the real winners/losers from a given management development intervention?

We assume that in reading this book you have some interest in such issues. This may be as a researcher seeking to identify the value and significance of management development activities; you may be an HR specialist desiring to improve and/or assess the impact of a new development programme; you may run your own organization and be weighing up the value of developing your managers; or you may simply be curious about the development process as a participant. Whatever your particular stance, our aim is to deepen your understanding by helping you become more reflexive about the intentions, practices and consequences of management development activities.

Why is the study of management development important?

There are a number of compelling reasons to engage in the study of management development and we set out a few here in no particular order of importance. Perhaps the two most obvious reasons are economic and financial.

Economics

From the macro-economic perspective there has been a long-standing belief that national productivity can be attributed to three types of investment: in firm-specific production, in distribution and in managerial capabilities. The last is widely recognized as the most important (Chandler and Hikino, 1997; Cassis, 1997; Kay, 2003). Although the logic and plausibility of this skills–performance link is open to question (e.g. Grugulis and Stoyanova, 2006), this does little to diminish the concern of governments, both national and international, about the calibre of managers. This is often accompanied by the notion that lessons can be learnt from competitor countries. So in Europe for instance, the globalization of business and the emergence of a new knowledge-based economy are seen to be challenging the adaptability of European education and training systems (European Commission, 2000). And the EU's poor productivity relative to the USA and other industrialized countries has been linked, in particular, to the inferior quality of management in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), especially in the use of information and communication technologies (O'Mahoney and Van Ark, 2004). This is also reflected in the developing economies of Europe, where in some cases the needs are more fundamental (see Box 1.1).

Box 1.1   Developing managers in Central Europe

In 1998 and 2000 a cross-country analysis of management training was conducted in nine Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, including several preparing to join the EU (Gudic, 2001). Based on interviews in over 1,000 companies, the following findings were highlighted:

- The existence of a passive, even negative, attitude towards change, culturally embedded from a long experience of living in a static environment – this is limiting the managerial capabilities desperately needed to conceive, develop and implement appropriate strategic responses.
- The HR function is primarily focused on staffing activities while neglecting those dealing with human resources development (HRD) and management development.
- According to general managers, the greatest capabilities are concentrated at the highest levels of management. This reflects an attitude that the hierarchy remains untouchable or that managers are assessed according to their experience rather than against criteria of innovative behaviour, social and cultural competence, etc.
- Managers have difficulty articulating their training needs and tend to follow what's on offer from training providers, who market their current product/service portfolio rather than investigate what their customers' needs really are.

Financial

From the financial perspective at firm-level (our second reason), management development is often expected to lead to bottom-line gains. Such expectations have led to management development generating an industry of its own throughout the world. Government departments, professional institutes, training agencies, consultancies, business schools, corporate universities are just some of the groups who stand to gain from the continued and increasing preoccupation with creating a new generation of business leaders and managers. The global investment in management development activity, estimated to be $37 billion some years ago (Boyatzis et al., 1996), has increased markedly since then. In developed economies like the UK, some 20 million days per year are spent on programmed management training, a figure that could well be doubled if less formal development is taken into consideration (Burgoyne et al., 2004). This is quite apart from the indirect aspects of investment such as time spent on design and delivery, opportunity costs, the setting up of training systems and evaluation activities. In France, there is a legal requirement for employers to allocate 1.5 per cent of total annual payroll to vocational training, although it is the employer who decides how, and on whom, this is spent. Turning to emerging economies, there is a rapid game of 'catch-up' taking place, as governments and enterprises across all sectors seek to address their management and leadership deficiencies (e.g. Osman-Gani and Tan, 2000; Wang and Wang, 2006). In Central Europe the investment in training managers for individual companies ranges from several thousand US dollars up to $135,000 in Romania and up to $625,000 in Slovenia (Gudic, 2001). Naturally, given the number of days devoted to manager training and the amount of investment in these activities, there is keen interest in knowing whether these are resources well spent. Training days and development budgets are only input measures. There is consistent clamour for some measure of the outcomes, but such evidence about the quality and benefits arising from management development is difficult to come by.

All this prompts us to pose a perplexing paradox central to the book: would so much management development take place in the absence of the kind of economic and financial imperatives set out above? Intuitively, we may answer in the negative. But the picture becomes less clear when we consider that there are actually very few studies that unequivocally support the economic and financial case for management development. This raises a number of questions as to what other interests or purposes are being served by, and/or what other levels of meaning are invested in, this activity, leading us in turn towards a number of alternative, non-financial reasons for studying it.

Diverse Meanings

Accordingly, a third reason for the study of management development relates to the array of meanings the activity can take on. Each of the various players involved in management development is likely to ascribe a different rationale to such activities, depending on their respective roles (Lees, 1992). For example, the ultimate

sponsors of a management development initiative (e.g. senior executives) may well make sense of it at least partially in terms of the company image they wish to project. Participants in the programme may read other meanings into it. For example, they may see their selection for the programme as a symbol of their value to the organization, a reward for a job well done or conversely a remedial form of punishment. By the same token, non-participants may share yet other understandings of the programme, perhaps seeing it as a means to exclude them from fast-track career development. Meanwhile, HRD specialists may regard the design of management development as a means to boost their flagging corporate influence and professional status among peers. Because management development is invariably a high-profile activity, encumbered with high expectations by different parties and conducted close to the power nexus of the organization, it offers a superb opportunity to observe at close quarters the alternative accounts and political machinations of those involved.

Moral

A fourth reason for the study of management development relates to an examination of its moral or ethical currency. Training and development processes can be demanding. In terms of extra-mural effort and personal time, much is asked of the participant. In some cases this discretionary effort can extend to their line manager, their colleagues and even their family and non-work relationships. Furthermore, the emotional and psychological demands of certain development activities can place managers in a position of vulnerability (see Box 1.2).

Box 1.2   Challenging the ethics of 'self-revelatory' management development

Management development often transcends a rationalist concern with skills training, drawing on emotional experience in an attempt to remould the attitudes, character and even the personalities of practising managers. By challenging the individual as a person as well as a manager, Ackers and Preston (1997) claim that certain development initiatives have entered an existential terrain that was previously the province of the religious conversion process. Since career progression is typically linked to the observed adherence of values, beliefs and behaviours typically communicated via management development, participation in such programmes often signals vulnerability not power. The further such programmes penetrate into the manager's private psychological or emotional space, the more acute resulting anxieties may become. As such, Ackers and Preston believe that there are good grounds for questioning both the ethics and efficacy of programmes that cross the border between skills enhancement and psycho-therapeutic character (re)formation.

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The authors illustrate this with reference to a management development programme at a UK footwear retailer. The programme required each participant to reveal in front of others their personal history (from childhood onwards) in a bid to tease out self-perceptions of strengths and weaknesses. This formed the basis for much subsequent group discussion and the elaboration of personal developmental action plans. Such plans were intended to deal with the 'whole person' rather than specific work-related issues. Almost all managers seemed enthusiastic about the process, reporting enhanced self-awareness and understanding. A few, however, questioned the intensity of the programme and the self-disclosure it required, speaking of the fears and anxieties it provoked. One manager professed to feeling almost driven to tears at times. The authors conclude by suggesting that there is something disturbing and inauthentic about this type of programme, with its attempt to provoke a search for deep personal meaning within the walls of a modern business organization.

Such accounts raise a number of questions: In what kinds of activities are managers being asked to participate under the guise of development? How are such activities being 'sold' to managers? Using what kind of language? Who gets either included or excluded and on what grounds? And notwithstanding the stated objectives of the programme, whose or what interests are ultimately being served by it? Most HR practices incorporate an ethical dimension, but in many ways it is management development that brings such issues into sharpest relief.

Identity-creation

A fifth and somewhat related reason for considering the study of management development to be important is that the activity plays a significant part in defining what it is to actually be a manager. Here we are not talking just in terms of the formal transfer of knowledge and skills that takes place during development programmes. We are also referring to the informal processes, including those of socialization that surround the activity. Such processes might be considered as being beside the point when it comes to management development. However, as we shall see repeatedly throughout this book, the label 'manager' is by no means self-evident. When does an individual start to be, or cease to be, a manager? What differentiates a manager from a leader? What does the ascription 'manager' imply? And how are the answers to such questions communicated, sustained and/or contested? Management development as a project is central to such concerns (see Box 1.3).

Box 1.3   The gendered construction of managerial identity

A study was made of both formal and informal socialization processes among a group of graduate trainees in a Swedish corporation (Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2002) Her particular focus was the ways in which such processes contributed to the gendered constructions of managerial identity. She distinguished the messages being sent out by the company via management training as to whether they were overt or covert on the one hand and whether they contested or confirmed stereotypical portrayals of gender on the other hand. She found that, despite the company sending out overt messages that it valued women and wanted more of them among its more senior ranks, the upper echelons of management remained stubbornly male. She put this down to the dogged persistence of a more covert or implicit image of the manager as stereotypically masculine. 'Real managers' in this company remained people who were able to rely on a dutiful spouse in the home who could take care of domestic responsibilities. Those aspiring to be managers who did not fit the masculine/heterosexual model were subtly constructed as deviant, not real managers at all. Such findings were echoed in a study of graduate trainees in a UK audit firm, wherein one respondent cited the importance to managerial success of having a 'well packaged wife' (Grey, 1994).

These are processes where language and the use of metaphor play a key role in shaping our view of the organizational world and also of our own managerial selves. This then underlines why the analysis of management development is so topical and compelling. It provides a window on to the identity formation of managers themselves.

A manifesto for the study of management development

So if these are some indications as to why much is yet to be learnt about management development, what is the current knowledge in the field and which are the most promising lines of further enquiry?

Existing research: the 'state of play'

The study of management development has indeed produced a rich seam of research over recent years. Leaving aside a good deal of writing which is under-theorized and conceptually lacking, what might be termed naïve empiricism (Johnson and Duberley, 2000), authors have tended to invoke a wide range of theories in their studies (economic, sociological, psychological, institutional, to name

just a few) and an array of methodologies (positivist, ethnographic, interpretivist, among others). Perhaps the majority of research, however, seeks to explain management development in instrumental terms and is concerned with representing the benefits in the language of accounting and economics professionals (e.g. Swanson, 2001). Much of this goes unquestioned, but some deem this to be an unhealthy preoccupation with performance, because it tends to subjugate developmental activities to an over-simplified means–end calculation (Kamoche, 1994). It is also criticized for underestimating the processual, unfolding nature of management development decision-making (Martocchio and Baldwin, 1997).

Another school of thought draws upon grand narratives to point out the socially divisive nature of management practice, noting that unequal power relations are frequently reinforced rather than remedied by training interventions (Reed and Anthony, 1992). It could be argued that such a critique rules out the possibility that carefully constructed management development has the potential to empower individuals (Bowen and Lawler, 1992) and lead to productive outcomes for the employer organization (Willmott, 1997). Indeed, some go so far as to claim that this critical approach can result in replacing one type of absolutism, that of performativity, with another, namely the elevation of partisan rights (Fournier and Grey, 2000). A further strand of theory explores the conditions which facilitate individual learning and development. This approach has been variously criticized as disinterested in the politics of training (Ezzamel et al., 1996), uninformed about the effects of learning as discourse (Fairclough and Hardy, 1997) and preoccupied with the benefits to individuals at the expense of furthering organizational performance, although this last criticism has been staunchly countered by Holton (2002), who argues that to separate individual and corporate value is a false and unhelpful dichotomy.

So there is no shortage of analysis (although it should be noted that critical theory in particular lacks extended empirical studies). The problem is that such disparate attempts to conceptualize management development frequently fail to cross-fertilize and inform practice. At worst, researchers remain so committed to their favoured paradigms that they are dismissive of findings of work from other traditions. To onlookers, this may appear like esoteric in-fighting between academics. However, management development is a field particularly prone to anecdotal advice, to fashion (Bell et al., 2002) and to 'genre training' (Mole, 1996). Using appropriate methods and research tools to sift the claims, the rhetoric and the truth statements concerning management development may actually prove to be a timely contribution to those responsible for researching, designing, commissioning and assessing such activities.

How can this be done in a way that does justice to the full range of potential explanations? What is required is a means to magnify the different facets of management development. Metaphors provide a useful start.

Metaphors and management development

We only have to reflect on the language invoked by organizations to appreciate that there is no single, definitive interpretation of management development activities.

By providing highly vivid, mental pictures, metaphors in particular can play an important part in determining how we construe actors and events. Why is this? They can make abstract ideas accessible. They can communicate more powerfully than literal descriptions. They often convey emotions in a way that more cerebral communication does not. They can throw new light and meaning on familiar concepts. And they can do all of this succinctly. Consider these statements taken from the management development literature of British Plaster Board (BPB), part of the Saint Gobain business headquartered in France (Box 1.4).

Box 1.4   Management development in Saint Gobain

BPB is a big business – a global family of more than 13,000 people with different backgrounds, cultures and approaches. They are also very successful – each one of their businesses is strong in its own right, even though they are operating in an environment that continues to be competitive, demanding and constantly changing. In order to create their management and leadership capability, BPB have introduced a number of leadership development programmes.

Being big and successful brings many things. It brings challenge, excitement and diversity. It brings opportunities. It also brings a need for uncompromisingly high standards and responsibilities, to our customers, our people, our shareholders and to the environment in which we live. We need strong leaders to deliver these. Being a leader at BPB is about entering into a partnership. BPB leaders continually push the boundaries towards achieving our vision, and in return gain a breadth and depth of expertise, skills and qualities that they take with them for life.

Reflection point

What are the key metaphors in this brief excerpt and what do they communicate? How do they engage your emotions and what do they imply for those participating in management development for this organization?

The first metaphor is one of family. This simultaneously conveys a sense of belonging and obligation. One is led to think of being looked after and cared for. This could imply dependence on parents, who 'know best'. Unlike more transactional ties, familial relationships are for life and cannot be revoked. Given the harshness of the competitive environment that is also alluded to, one wonders what might happen to family members if the organization performed poorly. Likewise, how might the family react if an individual announced his/her departure? Another

metaphor is one of partnership. This communicates a relationship of equals, with give and take. In return for supreme effort, the leader receives skills for life. This is quite a different perspective from the first, though the subject matter is the same. Here one's attention is drawn away from the security of family bonds to the expectations of leaders. The language implies an organizational promise to the individual of special treatment and accelerated career progress, presuming, of course, that they are able to maintain the 'uncompromisingly high standards and responsibilities'.

At this point we are not arguing for the rights or wrongs of St Gobain's conception of leadership; simply that metaphors have the ability to quickly 'hook' the emotions and allegiances of the hearers, and that the judicious use of analogy can extract from the same or similar events very different meanings. Metaphors imply that a certain solution is inevitable and we can be seduced by the persuasiveness and potency of the image without realizing there is another view. They call for action rather than argument, as in the example above: '*We need strong leaders*', people who will '*continually push the boundaries towards achieving our vision*'.

Because metaphors are a kind of 'short-hand' they will not tell the whole story; they will probably give only one version of events and omit certain details. Nevertheless they paint a picture of 'reality' and the meanings we attribute to what is going on around us influence the actions we take. The relevance of all this to the training and development of managers is unmistakable. Metaphorical language plays an important part in the way different players construe the organization (a global family? a headless chicken? a sinking ship?); in the way the imperative for management development is articulated (the need to extend boundaries? the need to delight the customer?); and in the way the impact of changes are subsequently assessed (a change in hearts and minds? a leaner, meaner way of working? deckchairs rearranged on the decks of the *Titanic*?).

If, as seems clear, there are multiple readings of management development, this leads us to a further quandary. How can management development be theorized in a way which does justice to these contrasting perspectives?

Reframing management development

In this section we consider three possible approaches: the use of frames, the use of paradigms and the use of discourses. While each has its value, we conclude that the last of these is best suited for exploring the multifaceted nature of management development.

Frames

The way we think about organizations and the way we evaluate organizational practice is typically myopic and ingrained. In their book *Reframing* Organizations, Bolman and Deal (1997) offer four different frames for making sense of the value-dilemmas, factional pressures and multiple constituencies of modern corporate existence: the structural, the human resource, the political and the symbolic. Their central thesis is that managers habitually adopt one, or at best two of these frames. However, armed with the insights gained from viewing events and incidents

through the other frames or lenses, the authors argue that managers are better equipped to understand and influence their part of the organization. The primary focus of their book is leadership and the manager as agent of change; it is therefore highly pertinent to management development. Others have applied four-frame thinking to leadership in academic institutions (Bergquist, 1992; Birnbaum, 1992), to identify strategies for informal learning during periods of organizational instability (Marsick et al., 1999) and to the conceptualization of human resource development (Mabey, 2003).

Despite the intuitive appeal of Bolman and Deal's four frames, a number of questions remain about their utility (Palmer and Dunford, 1996). First, further research is needed as to whether the improved cognition afforded by reframing actually enhances the day-to-day skills of the manager. Second, are the four proposed frames in some way superior to others that might be invoked, and if so, on what basis? The value of metaphor as discussed above is that it encourages lateral and creative thinking, without limiting the analyst to a predetermined set of lenses. Third, and more fundamentally, although the device helpfully prompts deliberate reframing, all four of the frames are essentially positivist in their orientation: 'The reframing perspective retains a sense of there being an underlying reality which the aggregation of frames is able to more accurately portray' (Palmer and Dunford, 1996: 147).

Naturally, there is a place for functionalist studies and positivist methods. A good deal of this book will consider such work. The difficulty arises when this is assumed to be the only way to analyze and understand organizational activities like management development. In fact, the focus of our study (site, subjects, context, and so on), the tools and methods we use for analysis, the way we report what we find and the conclusions we draw are not 'givens' but choices (Box 1.5).

Box 1.5   Researcher choices: ontology and epistemology

Ontology concerns the status of social and natural reality and epistemology is the study of the criteria by which we can know what does and what does not constitute warranted, or scientific, knowledge. A positivist ontology assumes that an objective reality exists, independent of the researcher, and a positivist epistemology proposes that, given the appropriate tools and techniques, this reality can be faithfully ascertained and reported as scientific knowledge. Although dominant in management journals, this is just one of several ontologies/epistemologies adopted by management research. For example, a subjectivist ontology asserts that researchers, like everyone else, creatively construct their own culturally derived paradigms, which will determine the object of study, how it is studied, the criteria for choosing problems, and so on. Therefore reality has no independent, verifiable status; rather it is the creation of our consciousness and cognitions. A subjectivist epistemology is interpretative and concerned to understand the multiple versions of reality with particular reference to the role of language in social construction.

The tendency to rely upon a functionalist stance has been well explored in the related fields of organization behaviour and human resource management (HRM). Indeed, it leads one commentator to characterize HRM as largely a modernist project: 'Positivism, with its realist ontology, seeks to explain and predict what happens in the social world by searching for regularities and causal relationships between its constituent elements. … To a greater or lesser extent this is the logic which reigns in much of the research on HRM, even when it is case-study based…' (Legge, 1996: 308). Similarly, in the arena of work and organizational psychology, Symon and Cassell (2006: 310) note that most researchers fail to make a 'conscious (political) choice to adopt positivism but that it is more of a default option'. The authors attribute this to conventional research training, which is steeped in the precepts of positivism and neglects other perspectives.

To a wide extent, this is also the case in the field of management development. Functionalist objectives are often taken for granted and research is often restricted to evaluating the extent to which these are met. Such an approach has been criticized for failing to deal adequately with causality (Kamoche, 2000) and for taking a unitarist perspective, where organizational members are assumed to share a single set of motives and interests (Burgoyne and Jackson, 1997). Some would go further, casting management development as a largely one-sided attempt by senior management to impose control or advance ideological power interests rather than as a means to 'develop' employees in any kind of holistic or benevolent sense (Ackers and Preston, 1997). Management development has also been portrayed as a bureaucratic and potentially harmful irrelevance, where standardized portrayals of management bear little resemblance to the diverse worlds of 'real' managers (e.g. Grugulis, 2002). In contrast to these broadly negative critiques, other authors have suggested that deeper insight might be gained by trying to look beyond questions of good or evil (Townley, 1998), success or failure (du Gay et al., 1996) and by searching for more multifaceted ways in which management development might simultaneously work for and against the interests of any particular agent. It is in this regard that paradigms and discourses come to the rescue.

Paradigms

Probably the most influential attempt to delineate contrasting paradigms (and liberate researchers from the confines of functionalist assumptions) in the field of social theory and organizational analysis is that of Burrell and Morgan (1979). They propose two axes. One axis concerns the nature of the social world and how it might best be investigated, ranging from subjectivist to objectivist assumptions about ontology, epistemology, human nature and methodology. The other axis refers to the nature of society, ranging from regulation at one extreme to radical change at the other. This leads to four paradigms: functionalism, interpretivism, radical humanism and radical structuralism. These appear to offer fruitful avenues for researching aspects of organizational behaviour (e.g. Hassard, 1991; Schultz and Hatch, 1996), including management development and organizational learning (e.g. Ortenblad, 2002). Burrell and Morgan (1979) emphasize that these four paradigms are mutually exclusive, and by accepting one set of metatheoretical assumptions the researcher denies the alternative. 'Because the meta-theoretical norms of one paradigm are not

translatable into those of an alternative, there cannot be any *a priori*, independent, neutral or rational grounds for debate or for deciding upon which paradigm has the better problem-solving capacity' (Johnson and Duberley, 2000: 80). Reducing such analysis to a choice between discrete alternatives has, however, been challenged. For example, it has been argued that regarding the four paradigms as polarized sets of assumptions is probably not sustainable in practice (Willmott, 1993), and it is proposed that by blurring the 'transition zones between paradigms it is possible to construct bridges that link the apparently disparate concepts in these zones' (Gioia and Pitre, 1990: 599). Another way out of the cul-de-sac of incommensurability is to derive some kind of meta-theory (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000; Johnson and Duberley, 2000). This presents the possibility of 'rising above' commitment to any single ontological stance in order to assess the comparative contribution of the conflicting theories in any given research domain (noting that any such meta-theoretical stance inevitably involves partiality!). Probably the most promising means for achieving this is that of discourse.

Discourse

The notion of discourse has been defined and used in many different ways (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000).

Reflection point

Consider, for example the various definitions set out in Box 1.6. What similarities do you see between them? Do you also see any contrasts between them? If so, what might be the practical effects of these?

Box 1.6   Defining discourse(s)

[A discourse is] a connected set of statements, concepts, terms and expressions which constitutes a way of talking and writing about a particular issue, thus framing the way people understand and act with respect to that issue. (Watson, 1994: 113)

A discourse is a particular way of representing some part of the (physical, social, psychological) world – there are alternative and often competing discourses associated with different groups of people in different social positions. … Discourses differ in how social events are represented, what is excluded or included, how abstractly or concretely events are represented, and how more specifically the processes and relations, social actors, time and place of events are represented… (Fairclough, 2003: 17)

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> Discourses are sets of ideas and practices which condition our ways of relating to and acting upon particular phenomena: a discourse will be expressed in all that can be thought, written or said about a particular topic, which by constituting the phenomenon in a particular way influences behaviour. In these respects, discourses constrain and stabilize the free-play of signifiers into a particular gaze. ... Discourses are social constructions and the existence of a reality independent of their knowledge constitution is at best precarious ... we can never attain any knowledge save that constructed in and by some discourse. (Johnson and Duberley, 2000: 102)

> Discourse refers to the language used for talking about a topic and for producing a particular kind of knowledge about that topic (du Gay 1996). Far from reflecting an already given social reality, language which is taken for granted constitutes reality as it appears to us ... meaning is not constant across discourses (for example between feminist and management discourses) and is subject to historical change. (Rees and Garnsey, 2003: 556)

As authors we find all of the above definitions both useful and relevant to the project we embark upon in this book. They are all similar in describing discourses as the means by which the world comes to be represented in particular and often competing ways, each of which is subject to change and evolution through time. They also all allude to the implications of this for our own relationship to the world, that is we are likely to speak, think, behave, act and react differently depending on the discourse(s) to which we subscribe (implicitly or otherwise) at any one point in time. The differences between the various definitions are also worth pondering for a moment. Some of them equate discourse fairly narrowly to the use of language. Others, notably Johnson and Duberley, embrace a much broader definition, linking it to non-linguistic practices as well as mere speech acts. These might include, for example, the physical segregation of high potential managers from lower performing ones in a fast-track programme. Another example comes from Fournier (1998), who noted how 'entrepreneurial' finance trainees in a UK public utility were physically located in plush city-centre offices in contrast to IT trainees located in drab offices located in a run-down part of town. For Fournier, this is a discursive (if extra-linguistic) means of constituting social relations in a particular way (i.e. hierarchically) and of conveying meaning. In both instances, distinctly different career paths are signposted in ways that transcend the linguistic.

A further difference between the definitions relates to ontology or, in other words, the ultimate reality of our world (see Box 1.5). Note, for example, how Watson's and Fairclough's definitions speak of how discourses can differentially 'frame' or 'represent' a phenomenon (e.g. an issue, a social event) but without calling into question the ultimate (or ontological) status of such phenomenon. Contrast this with the latter two definitions that imply that discourses are also the

means by which the very reality of a phenomenon is actually constructed (which also implies the notion of multiple and competing realities). We would claim that each of the above definitions of discourse also constitutes a mini-discourse in and of itself in as much as it seeks to ontologically represent the world of which it speaks and thus create knowledge about that world. Equally, any attempt by us as authors to choose between such definitions must also be seen as an example of discourse in action. And this leads us into a fundamental tenet of this book, which is to consciously (and as reflexively as possible) invoke different discourses in order to scrutinize management development (see Box 1.7). In so doing, we trust that our book will encourage you to analyze management development in a more reflexive manner. Whether you are conducting a research project, planning a new management development initiative or reviewing a consultant's proposal, the aim is to equip you to test assumptions, critically weigh any data, assess the way it is presented and linguistically portrayed, and draw more informed judgements about how to proceed. We will outline our chosen discourses in a moment. Before doing so, however, we would like to say a few words about the thorny issue of how to identify discourses and delineate their boundaries.

Box 1.7   Being reflexive as a researcher and practitioner

Johnson and Duberley (2000: 66) are admirably succinct in describing reflexivity as 'thinking about our own thinking' in explicit acknowledgement that the search for knowledge will take different avenues depending on the paradigms and metaphors we choose to engage.

Willig (2001: 10) is more expansive in her treatment of the concept, distinguishing between two types of reflexivity: personal and epistemological:

'Personal reflexivity' involves reflecting upon the ways in which our own values, experiences, interests, beliefs, political commitments, wider aims in life and social identities have shaped the research. It also involves thinking about how the research may have affected and possibly changed us, as people and as researchers. 'Epistemological reflexivity' requires us to engage with questions such as: How has the research question defined and limited what can be 'found?' How has the design of the study and the method of analysis 'constructed' the data and the findings? How could the research question have been investigated differently? To what extent would this have given rise to a different understanding of the phenomenon under investigation? Thus, epistemological reflexivity encourages us to reflect upon the assumptions (about the world, about knowledge) that we have made in the course of the research, and it helps us to think about the implications of such assumptions for the research and its findings.

Finally, Cunliffe (2003: 985) expounds what she calls a 'radical' form of reflexivity that goes:

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> further than questioning the truth claims of others, to question how we as researchers (and practitioners) also make truth claims and construct meaning. This assumes that all research, positivist and anti-positivist, is constructed between research participants (researcher, 'subjects', colleagues, texts) and that we need to take responsibility 'for [our] own theorizing, as well as whatever it is [we] theorize about' (Hardy and Clegg, 1997: S13). In other words, we need to recognize our philosophical commitments and enact their internal logic, while opening them to critical questioning so that we expose their situated nature.

Recalling Watson's definition, a discourse can be thought of as a connected set of statements, concepts, terms and expressions which constitutes a way of talking and writing about a particular issue. But as others point out, discourses are social constructions that are subject to constant evolution. As such, there are no hard-and-fast rules as to what constitutes a discourse nor as to where the boundaries of any such discourse might lie. In this sense, the identification of individual discourses is more an art than a science. Having said this, Fairclough (2003: 129) makes two recommendations for the identification and delineation of discourses within a text:

1. Identify the main aspects of social life which are represented in the text or, in other words, the main 'themes'.
2. Identify the particular perspective, angle or viewpoint from which these aspects are being represented.

See if you can use the above to suggest any latent discourses within the following extracts taken from different participants in a recent qualitative study of management development (Finch-Lees et al., 2005):

> Just from my personal point of view, I would feel that the company is not going to invest money in you or send you on a course for no reason.

> I think if the company is prepared to invest in an individual and the individual can see that, the company can see the individual grow and actually takes probably more notice of that individual.

> My pay since I've joined has gone up 70% in four and a half years. … Now that is partly because of, I suppose, the work that's been done here. It's also partly I guess because the company feels confident in the individual that they're investing in. Now that has got to be because I'm also taking part in growing myself as an individual.

Our own assessment is that the main aspects of social life being represented in the above are those of *development* and its *impact*. But notice how the

company, in all three extracts, is represented as 'investing' in the individual, who is then expected to 'grow' as a result of such investment. This might easily be dismissed as unremarkable and simply the way 'normal people' speak. Indeed, we can imagine similar representations being uttered within most, if not all, contemporary organizations. However, this does not detract from the fact that the notion of development 'as investment' is a metaphorical rather than a literal interpretation of the activity. As such, we would characterize the above as examples of an individualist, accounting discourse of development. Here the perspective being taken is that of the entrepreneur or stockholder who makes financial investments in the expectation of maximizing her/his financial returns. In this case it is the organization which is being discursively constructed as the stockholder with the individual being constructed as the entity (e.g. stock or asset) that is being invested in. Banal or not, this is not the only way in which development can be represented and evaluated. Participants might equally have chosen (and may in other contexts choose) to speak of the more collectivist and perhaps less quantifiable impacts of development, such as those relating to social responsibility, sustainability, diversity, community or general quality of life. Our last point here is that the discourses with which we engage are not inconsequential details of speech but have the capacity to enable as well as to either broaden or restrict our thoughts, actions, beliefs and behaviours.

Following on from this, Johnson and Duberley (2000: 101–2) have observed that:

> any management discipline would be seen as a particular historical and social mode of engagement that restricts what is thinkable, knowable and doable in its disciplinary domain. Through their education and training, managers learn to speak this discourse and the discourse speaks to them by structuring their experiences and definitions of who they are.

Using discourse to understand management development therefore seems highly apt. If this is the case, which particular discourses have most relevance?

Discourses of management development

Given the noted shortcomings of reframing on the one hand, and paradigms on the other, we choose to use discourse (which includes attention to metaphor) as the primary vehicle for examining management development in this book. We do this in two ways. First, by referring to four overarching theoretical perspectives (or 'Grand Discourses', see Box 1.8), namely functionalism, constructivism, critical and dialogic. In the middle part of the book we look at each of these in some detail. Second, we examine management development through the lens of three emblematic practitioner lenses (or 'meso-discourses'), namely best-practice, institutional and diversity.

Box 1.8   Levels of Discourse

Alvesson and Kärreman (2000) distinguish between four different levels of discourse: micro-discourse, meso-discourse, Grand Discourse, and finally Mega-Discourse:

- Grand Discourses (purposely written with a capital 'D') are described by the authors as 'an assembly of discourses [note the little 'd'], ordered and presented as an integrated frame. A Grand Discourse may refer to/constitute organizational reality, for example dominating language use about corporate culture or ideology' (2000: 1133). It is at this 'Grand' level that we situate our four theoretical discourses, with func-tionalism being the dominant one when it comes to the everyday work-ings of the typical organization.
- Meso-discourse (purposely written with a small 'd') can be thought of as language and social practice whose meaning is more context-specific than Grand Discourse, but which nevertheless transcends the particular text in question, thus forming broader patterns of meaning that can be generalized to similar local contexts. It is at this 'meso' level that we situate our three practitioner discourses. Note, however, that there is no neat fit between levels. For example, any discourse at the meso-level could conceivably straddle two or more at the Grand level and vice versa.

We do not concern ourselves particularly with either a Mega-Discourse or a micro-discourse approach in this book. However, for the sake of complete-ness, each can respectively be understood as follows:

- Mega-Discourse: the idea of a universally standardized connection of discourse and meaning.
- Micro-discourse: the idea of discourse forming purely localized forms of meaning that are unique to the context in question and cannot be reli-ably generalized to other contexts, locations or situations.

Four theoretical or 'Grand' management development Discourses

In order to map out the theoretical assumptions (and indeed Discourses) under-lying different avenues of management development research, we adopt a frame-work devised by Schultze and Stabell (2004). In exploring their chosen arena of research, that of knowledge management, these authors draw upon previous par-adigms of social and organizational enquiry (Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Deetz, 1996). The basis of their approach is the derivation of two dimensions or sets of assumptions: those concerning social order and those concerning epistemology (see Box 1.9).

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Box 1.9   Two axes of discourse

Social order: consensus versus dissensus

Research in the social sciences can be differentiated according to the
stance it takes towards existing social orders, or, in other words, the extent
to which it either serves to support or disrupt prevailing discourses within
its respective field of study. In the words of Alvesson and Deetz (2000: 26),
the consensus pole of this dimension 'draws attention to the way some
research programmes both seek order and treat order production as the
dominant feature of natural and social systems … through the highlighting
of ordering principles, such existing orders are perpetuated'. In contrast,
research located at the dissensus pole considers conflict, tension,
dilemma and struggle to be natural facets of the social world. As such, any
semblance of order is to be treated with suspicion and as an indication that
the full variety of human interests is in some way being suppressed.
Research located towards this end of the dimension generally seeks to
reclaim conflict with a view to somehow altering the balance of power within
a particular field or, indeed, within society more generally.

Epistemology: dualism versus duality

Here the interest is in the nature of knowledge and how it is captured.
Schultze and Stabell (2004) characterize this epistemological dimension as
dualism versus duality. Dualism seeks to answer the question 'what is the
phenomenon' or focus of our study and implies 'either/or' thinking which
prompts the researcher to look for theoretically driven classifications and tax-
onomies. It is assumed that the phenomenon under investigation is frozen in
time, has an identity that is separate/separable from the rest of the social
world and can be fully understood. Causal relationships are uni-directional and,
with appropriate research tools, can be faithfully determined. In contrast, dual-
ity is more concerned with the question 'when is the phenomenon?'; although
grammatically awkward, the idea is to highlight the unfolding nature of social
phenomena rather than treating them as objectively analyzable and frozen-
in-time. This perspective also resists the construction of false dichotomies
and mutually exclusive opposites, preferring to apply 'both/and' thinking.
Researchers acknowledge that the object of their study is continuously shap-
ing and being shaped by situated practice; as a consequence, theorizing is
associated with emergence and cyclical causality. 'Theories based on duality
are particularly useful for studying contradictions and paradoxes because
they consider opposing forces that act simultaneously on the same phenom-
enon' (Schultze and Stabell, 2004: 554).

From these two dimensions they derive four distinct research perspectives,
or Discourses, which they claim to be particularly apposite for exploring the

contradiction of managing tacit knowledge in organizations. They label these four Discourses: the neo-functionalist, the constructivist, the critical and the dialogic.

We choose to adopt these Discourses to analyze management development in this book for a number of reasons. In their account, Schultze and Stabell trace more carefully than most the theoretical assumptions underlying extant research. This helps to cue us in to contrasting, and on occasions conflicting, literatures pertaining to management development. Also, their subject matter, the way tacit knowledge is managed, is closely aligned to the paradoxical issues associated with developing managers and leaders in organizations. Furthermore, as has become clear, the advantage of Discourses over paradigms, is that they are not intended to be theoretically watertight boxes and their permeability allows us to be more imaginative about the way they might flow into each other. The term 'Discourse' is preferable because it 'highlights that each is plagued by internal debates, that the edges between worldviews are not well demarcated, and that debates in one worldview influence debates in the others' (Schultze and Stabell, 2004: 555). This presents the interesting possibility of employing, for example, functionalist or indeed critical Discourses from an ultimate standpoint of the dialogic, which is something that the more static notion of paradigm would preclude. However, we replace the term 'neo-functionalist' with 'functionalist' because it is not clear to us (and not explained by Schultze and Stabell) why this Discourse is distinctively new or 'neo'. Table 1.1 begins to characterize how each Discourse treats the field of management development.

In chapters 3–6 we examine each of these Discourses in turn. Each provides valuable insight and explanation, in part complementary and in part contradictory, as to what the management development 'project' signifies.

We do not intend to promote any one of the Discourses referred to above as being necessarily superior to the others. Having said this, we do acknowledge that the very notions of Discourse, and indeed reflexivity, sit least comfortably in the positivist world of functionalism (Cunliffe, 2003) and most comfortably within the three epistemologically subjectivist Discourses (i.e. the dialogic, the critical, and the constructivist). As Alvesson and Deetz (2000) point out, the idea of text (spoken or written) creating or constituting 'reality' is a central tenet of a subjectivist epistemology. They go on to point out that discourses can be viewed as 'systems of thought which are contingent upon as well as inform material practices, which not only linguistically but also practically – through particular power techniques […] produce particular forms of subjectivity' (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000: 97). However, the fact that functionalism does not readily embrace the notion of discourse does not prevent it from being analyzed *as a Discourse* in and of itself. This we attempt to do throughout the book, especially since (as already noted) it typically forms the dominant Discourse within everyday organizational life. However, and especially in Chapters 3, 7 and 8, we also engage (to an extent at least) with functionalism on its own terms. In other words, we will often write as if we accept its realist/objectivist ontology and epistemology, rather than merely dismissing these, as is the tendency of many critical and/or dialogic texts. While this kind of 'ontological oscillation' is polemical to say the least (Cunliffe, 2003), we do it here in the spirit of a reflexive multi-discourse approach to organizational

TABLE 1.1   *Four Discourses of management development (MD) research*

	Duality	Dualism
Dissensus	**Dialogic Discourse**	**Critical Discourse**
	Metaphors of MD: discipline, carnival, reproduction, dressage.	Metaphors of MD: political struggle, religious conversion, cultural doping.
	Role of MD in organization: a vehicle for the active construction of identities which are themselves inherently multiple, shifting and negotiated.	Role of MD in organization: to produce and resist order, predictability, control, domination, subordination.
	Theories: post-structuralism, feminist post-structuralism, postmodernism, deconstruction, Foucauldian social theory.	Theories: critical theory, labour process theory, some forms of feminism.
	Research domains: MD as discourse, identity construction within MD, deconstructing the language of MD.	Research domains: MD as a means to either change or preserve the balance of power within organizations. MD's role in perpetuating capitalist ideology.
Consensus	**Constructivist Discourse**	**Functionalist Discourse**
	Metaphor of MD: *drama*.	Metaphor of MD: a *tool-kit*.
	Role of MD in organization: enabling collective learning and self-development, conferring meaning/status.	Role of MD in organization: building skills and knowledge to address performance gaps and optimize resources.
	Theories: agency, role behaviour, learning, resource-based, theories of practice, sense-making.	Theories: intellectual capital, open systems, HRM, institutional, contingency, resource-based.
	Research domains: modes of MD and their outcomes, cultural significance of MD.	Research domains: performance impact of formal MD activities, evaluation studies.

analysis. It is also in this spirit of reflexivity that we encourage the reader to engage with it.

Up until now we have used words such as 'explore', 'examine' and 'adopt' to describe what we plan to do with these Discourses in Chapters 3–6. To an extent such terms are appropriate. But they do risk creating an impression of exaggerated solidity around the whole notion of discourse. They do this by making the four Grand Discourses sound as if they 'exist' in the sense that something like, say, a book exists. However, Discourses are not something that can be plucked from a shelf and simply 'read off' before being subjected to analysis. As such, it needs to be acknowledged that we, as authors, will not just be 'exploring', 'examining' or 'adopting' these Discourses. We will also be contributing to their maintenance and transformation. But as we explained earlier, the delineation of any Discourse is a problematic enterprise with no hard-and-fast rules. Our very acts of characterizing

and commenting upon other works as functionalist, constructivist, etc., must themselves be seen as discursive acts. In other words, *each chapter in this book can be considered to be a discourse in itself* and we would encourage readers to regard the assertions we make as modest and localized 'truth claims' as opposed to 'the truth'. For us to make any pretensions towards the latter would be to strive towards a grand 'theory of everything' in relation to management development. Had we considered this to be a realistic or worthwhile endeavour, we would not have embarked upon it by invoking the notion of discourse. Finally, a key aim in this book is to demonstrate that the practical implications of a subjectivist, multi-discourse approach are no less 'real' than those of an exclusively objectivist approach. As an aside, our comments in this paragraph apply just as equally to the meso-discourses we 'explore' in Chapters 7–9.

Before closing this section, we briefly reflect back on the five reasons for studying management development set out earlier in this chapter in order to say a few words about which of our four Grand Discourses might be best placed to tackle each.

Reasons 1 and 2: Economic and financial

The functionalist Discourse, with its objectivist and quantitative methodologies, is best positioned to address economic and financial concerns. Indeed, the majority of the management development literature is preoccupied with identifying the variables which enhance outcomes and with tracking, as precisely as is possible, the performance impact of such activities whether this be productivity at enterprise or national level. However, as already stated, for all the functionalist research that has taken place in this area over the years, there is actually very little hard evidence that management development can systematically lead to improved economic and financial outcomes. The three other Discourses help to problematize economic and financial imperatives while providing alternative explanations for the continuing popularity of management development.

Reason 3: Diverse meanings of management development

It is here that the constructivist Discourse comes into its own. This is a Discourse which privileges the multiple interpretations of a given phenomenon (in our case, management development) as seen through the eyes of different stakeholders. As such, management development is considered meaningful only to the extent that different stakeholders create meaning around it or read meaning into it. Although excellently placed to explore the less visible, subjective significance of management development, the constructivist researcher tends, however, to simply report the experience of participants, thus taking their accounts as face-value evidence of what is really going on in their heads. This is partly what differentiates the constructivist Discourse from the dialogic and the critical, both of which tend to overlay their own interpretations of stakeholder accounts.

Reason 4: Moral/ethical issues

It is in this realm that the critical Discourse provides penetrating insight. It does this by drawing on a large and complex body of critical theory to expose what it sees as dynamics of power and domination within seemingly benign activities.

Reason 5: The construction of managerial identity

It is in relation to this question that the dialogic Discourse comes into its own. Management development within this Discourse is to be considered as an important means among many by which organizational, managerial and non-managerial identities are created, adopted, resisted and negotiated.

Three practitioner discourses

So far, we have concentrated upon Grand Discourse, but meso-discourses, as described in Box 1.8, are also influential in the way management development is construed and practised. Of the many that we could have chosen, we single out three such discourses which appear to have considerable resonance in the field at this time. The notion of *best-practice* has been applied to many aspects of organizational life and management development is no exception. This discourse includes the ways in which policies, techniques and methods for developing managers come into vogue, gain credibility and come to govern activities in an almost sacred manner. This is not far removed from the *institutional* discourse, whereby the need to gain legitimacy with significant others (perhaps competitors, government, professional bodies, shareholders, one's own employees) is a prime driver for an organization to pursue certain management development activities and eschew others. This lens of analysis naturally requires a good understanding of the cultural and socio-economic context of the organization concerned. A last discourse to which we turn our attention is that of *diversity*. The issue of diversity in organizations has generated a vast literature, but it is the interface between the concern for a more diverse workforce and management development (frequently heralded as the best means to achieve such a goal) that is of particular interest here. We devote a chapter to each of these three discourses later in the book, although you will observe traces of each washing through earlier chapters also.

Conclusion

A cursory look at the field of management development leads to a reasonably encouraging picture. In most countries and firms, a good deal more prominence is being given to management development than in the past. This is matched by a steady stream of research reporting its extent, effectiveness and/or significance. Yet the 'state of play' remains somewhat unsatisfactory and baffling. We note, for example, that despite the difficulties associated with tracking the direct and measurable benefits of management development, there continues to be high investment in this activity. This is perplexing and suggests that there are ways of understanding management development other than in terms of its utility, performance and impact alone. We might also note the systemic and political complexity of conducting management development: conventional wisdom would have us believe in a linear, rational and controllable process, but our experience tells us that unintended consequences occur, good development ideas are drowned out by more pressing organizational demands and excellently conceived programmes often fail to live up to their promise. And at a more personal level, many individual managers struggle with the relevance and

meaninglessness of the training and development activities in which they are involved. Understandably they baulk at the compromises and, in some cases, sacrifices they have to make as participants. Others wonder why such development opportunities do not come their way at all. All this leads to a central conundrum of the book. Given that, at several levels, the high expectations invested in management development often remain unfulfilled, why is it a subject/activity that continues to command such intense interest from scholars and practitioners alike?

In this chapter we have begun to identify why management development is such a hot topic and briefly reviewed what current academic research tells us about management development policies and practices. To deepen our understanding of this arena and to address the above conundrum, we have proposed a multiple discourse approach. This is not without contention. For example, are such ways of viewing management development intended to be contingent whereby one perspective is particularly suited to a given set of circumstances, to be replaced with another as circumstances shift? Or do all discourses apply simultaneously as intriguingly discordant, multiple meanings of the same event or process? We take the latter view, acknowledging, however, that the dominance of any one discourse is as much a product of the inclinations and predispositions of the analyst as it is a reflection of the situation being researched. Second, and linked, is the question of whether competing discourses are commensurable. In their original discussion, Burrell and Morgan (1979) maintain that sociological paradigms are mutually exclusive constructions which, by definition, generate distinctive analyses of social life. Later, however, Morgan (1990) advocates the use of a range of perspectives to build up a composite picture of organizational issues and this is the approach we take in this section. We concur that a fundamental/theoretical synthesis of perspectives (or, in our case, Discourses) cannot be attained. Yet we believe our understanding of management development, which is the purpose of this book, can be significantly enriched by first identifying different Discourses and then finding stepping stones, or at least room for dialogue, between them.

Adopting a multi-discourse approach may be welcomed by many, especially those of a postmodernist and/or critical persuasion. But such authors would argue (rightly in our view) that any drive towards synthesis or ultimate consensus is misguided, partly because it is a fruitless mission epistemologically and partly because any such 'consensus' will inevitably favour dominant coalitions. This does, however, present a risk of increasing fragmentation of knowledge which undermines the significance of the management development 'project'. This echoes what may be taking place in the broader fields of Organization Behaviour and HRM. In his review of a number of such texts, Morgan (2000) refers to the development of research and theory on organization culture, for instance, and notes that intellectual differences are typically handled by silence: 'That is, writers simply ignore any opposing viewpoints. … [M]odernists, with a few exceptions, have ignored the postmodernists. However, postmodernists have been severely critical of the modernists. The concern here, therefore, is that further "conversations" will not degenerate into more "war games" ' (2000: 863), resulting in a loss of ideas and disillusioned people. To this we might add a further loss: that of confused or alienated practitioners! An alternative route, and one we propose to take in this book, is to encourage the

interplay of multiple discourses, seeking dialogue between them but without any search for ultimate synthesis or consensus. This will create tensions and contradictory data, but it is only as such complexities are confronted (without necessarily being resolved) that some of the more hidden meanings and significance of management development activities will become apparent.

One purpose of this book is to provide a text for those studying management development, leadership, HRD or related topics as part of a higher education course. For this reason, the ten chapters are designed to allow students to follow the material over a typical ten-week semester. Broadly speaking, the first part of the book (this and the next chapter) introduces the subject, defines some key terms and assembles a set of analytic approaches to guide a reflexive examination of the subject matter. The second part (Chapters 3–6) encourages us to step back and review the (largely implicit) theoretical perspectives which motivate and shape the study of management development. Here we explore four Grand Discourses (the functionalist, constructivist, postmodern and critical Discourses) in turn, assessing how each reveals different facets and offers unique explanations. This multi-discourse approach is extended in the third part of the book (Chapters 7–9) with reference to three further meso-discourses: those of best-practice, institutionalism and diversity. Again, we argue that each is highly influential in its own way, in framing our understanding of management development.

The overall intention of the book is to encourage reflexivity in the study and practice of management development. In the final chapter we offer some principles to guide those designing, those implementing, those participating in and those researching management development in the hope that your endeavours will be more constructively critical, more illuminating and, ultimately, more satisfying.

Summary

- **Management development has attracted a good deal of research, most of it from a functionalist perspective.**
- **Despite persistent attempts to attribute enhanced performance to management development, the evidence-base for this relationship is equivocal at best.**
- **It is highly probable that reliance upon positivist methods means that much of the significance of the management development project is routinely missed.**
- **Of the various proposed ways to understand the management development project more deeply and more reflexively, a multi-discourse approach holds most promise.**
- **The Grand Discourses (dialogic, functionalist, constructivist and critical) each provide the promise of unique illumination of what is happening in the name of management development.**
- **In addition, the three meso-level discourses of best-practice, institutionalism and diversity offer further opportunities to be reflexive about the management development project.**