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TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND THE LABOUR PROCESS DEBATE: A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

Principally, this paper is intended as a contribution to the theoretical debate on the implementation and institutionalization of total quality initiatives and their implications for the nature of the labour process and its management. Conceptually, the paper advances an alternative perspective to the received axiom that currently posits quality management as a universally beneficial panacea that will invariably deliver desired organizational objectives. It is argued that there are at least three dimensions to this task. The first dimension concerns itself with the rationale and nature of total quality approaches to the management of the firm. The second dimension focuses on the nature of the contemporary labour process debate, expanding on the Marxist paradigm developed by Braverman (1974). Thirdly, with the utility of labour process analysis, the third dimension subjects TQM to a more penetrative review, and in so doing rejects many of the core assumptions informing total quality in terms of empowerment, teamwork and corporate culture.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the 1980s, the documentary of “ground-breaking” techniques on how best to manage the contemporary business organization has assumed a pronounced legitimacy within the pages of the academic and popular business press. In reporting the changing context and manifestations of the firm in recent years, many of the accounts in the burgeoning management literature have sought to provide detailed reports that lucidly describe the myriad innovations and conceptual developments that currently inform critical thinking on the management of organizational change. The debate encapsulates the early missionary prescriptions of Peters and Waterman (1982) on how to develop cultures of “excellence”, to prevalent debates on becoming a “learning” organization (Senge 1990; Garvin 1993), and Business Process Re-engineering (Hammer 1990; Hammer and Champy 1993; Burke and Peppard 1993), to the most recent evidence suggesting that “the more organizations use TQM, the more positive results they get from their involvement efforts” (Lawler 1996, p.

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39). Arguably the change literature can be said to be currently replete with rhetoric concerned primarily with charging management interest with a sense of urgency and concern for the revitalization of organizational resources in the face of competitive pressures emanating on many fronts. Perhaps evangelical in approach, many of these accounts predominantly seek to promote a managerialist and anecdotal perspective to the extent that other organizational participants are accorded little or no investigation as to their contribution and disposition towards the introduction of organizational change (Wilkinson et al. 1991; Marchington 1995; Wilkinson and Willmott 1995). More often than not, barriers to penetrative critical analysis develop quite simply because the focus of consideration is principally concerned with the "corporate" implementation of programmed change interventions, with the result that many written accounts tend to use the unitary and managerialist language of plans, objectives, milestones and targets, thus neglecting what Buchanan and McCalman (1989) describe as the "personal story" of those involved in dealing with change as it is experienced on the ground. While acknowledging the overall argument about the need for new organization structures and management styles, Buchanan and McCalman (1989) also highlight that the weakness of current prescriptions on change is that there is an underlying subtext which suggests that "excellence" can be achieved with little or no expenditure of effort. This viewpoint becomes all the more manifest when one considers the marked dearth of critical studies on the implementation of organizational change initiatives as they are experienced by those closest to their realization (Wilkinson and Willmott 1995). A primary objective of this paper is to contribute in some way to the correction of this deficiency.

This paper focuses on one particular organizational change strategy, that of Total Quality Management (TQM). Principally, the paper is intended as a contribution to the theoretical debate about the implementation of total quality initiatives and their implications for the nature of the labour process and its management. Conceptually, the paper advances an alternative perspective to the received wisdom that currently posits quality management as a universally beneficial panacea that will invariably deliver desired organizational objectives. There are at least three dimensions to this task. The first dimension concerns itself with the rationale and nature of total quality approaches to the management of the firm. Discussed here is the recent emergence of more flexible forms of capital accumulation, the advent of economic neo-liberalism during the 1980s, as well as the challenges wrought by the Japanese model of production relations. More specifically examined is the key distinction between "hard" and "soft" conceptions of quality management, leading on to a brief discussion on the core characteristics of total quality. The second dimension

focuses on the nature of the contemporary labour process debate, expanding on the Marxist paradigm developed by Braverman (1974). This involves a brief discussion on the various strands of thought emanating from Braverman's interpretation of the labour process, chiefly the link between management strategies of control and labour process degradation. On this issue, the paper identifies a number of recent developments and advancements within the province of labour process analysis, specifically the nature of the relationship between power and subjectivity in the organization of work. Finally, with the utility of labour process analysis, the third dimension subjects TQM to a more penetrative investigation, and in so doing rejects many of the core assumptions informing total quality in terms of empowerment, teamwork and corporate culture.

2. THE RATIONALE AND NATURE OF TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT

By the 1980s, the "traditional" organization structure, a model which had served so successfully in the accumulation of capital, came close to collapse. The instrumental rationality of the model, with its innate ability to generate even greater efficiencies, seemingly had nowhere left to run. Its inflexible characteristic, lauded for its ease of measurement and control, was set to implode and destroy the very innovation and creativity that brought it thus far. In a postmodern retrospective of the traditional model, Clegg (1992) highlights a world slowdown in productivity growth, coupled with fierce international competition and inflationary pressures on wages, as reasons for stifling profitability which ultimately led to slowdowns in capital accumulation. Moreover, there was "a wholesale "internationalization" and associated "deindustrialization" of areas and enterprises which had previously been strongholds of the models application" (p. 35). Furthermore, in the broader context of political economy, the advent of "New Right" political philosophies, particularly in Great Britain and the United States, promoted a wholesale drive to deregulate economic markets, with an accompanying entrepreneurialist ideology providing much of the cultural impetus to stimulate a competitive and independent self-reliance on the part of the individual (Keenoy and Anthony 1992; Du Gay 1991; Kerfoot and Knights 1995). Thus the Fordist mass production regime of capital accumulation had seemingly disintegrated, spawning in its wake a new period of rapid change, flux and uncertainty which, according to Harvey (1989, p. 171), can be more generally characterized in terms of "the fleeting, the ephemeral, the fugitive, and the contingent in modern life".

In coming to terms with the imperatives of this "new" business environment, many firms have sought to reinvent themselves in terms of more flexible and responsive organizational strategies. Specifically within firms, one can point to the growth of corporate programmes concerned with the management of human resources, the more sophisticated of which deal with issues pertaining to corporate culture and total quality. While many of these programmes can claim a uniquely Western heritage, that is not to deny that they have been influenced by developments elsewhere in what is now generally regarded as a truly "global" marketplace. The emergence of the Japanese model of production relations in the 1980s has, for instance, altered many of the core principles underpinning the conventional wisdom surrounding the organization of work. This model, imbued with flexibility and built-in quality control, had shown that it was capable of challenging the faltering Western production techniques associated with scientific management, particularly in respect of manufacturing and management styles. Building on these "innovations", Western firms have cultivated new brands of organizational design with the hope of generating sustainable competitive advantages in the face of the Japanese threat and the extension of capital accumulation into low cost developing economies. In this context, then, total quality management has emerged as a management technology aimed at restoring Western business confidence in its ability to compete more efficiently in the global marketplace.

3. THE MEANING OF TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT

Total Quality Management has been defined in many ways (Crosby 1980; Deming 1986; Juran 1989; Oakland 1989; Drummond 1992). More often than not, phrases that seek to define total quality derive much of their logic from techniques associated with operational research – a derivative discipline of production management. Accordingly, much of the technical content of total quality is concerned with utilizing "hard" statistical tools that measure and specify standards of process control and quality assurance. Thus quality is variously concerned with achieving "zero defects" and "conformance to requirements" (Crosby 1980); "fitness for use" (Feigenbaum 1983); and "statistical process control" (Deming 1986). Yet relatively recent prescriptions on quality management have sought to extend their terrain of application so as to include the wider organizational context concerned with the strategic management of the firm and its resources, giving it a core responsibility in generating a sustainable competitive advantage (Wilkinson et al. 1991). The literature in this instance tends to highlight the "softer" aspects of quality management, particularly the strategic role of human resource management

(HRM) in effecting a change in corporate culture, enabling it to harness employee commitment in support of total quality (Oakland 1989; Downey 1996).

In a general discussion on the need for total quality management, Kromkowski and Murphy (1995) highlight many of the common characteristics associated with the more prominent proponents of quality. Specifically, they identify factors such as customer focus, continuous improvement, management by fact, process management, total participation and visible effective leadership. The significance of customer focus concerns the capability of the organization to satisfy the changing needs of its customers on an on-going basis, while the drive for continuous improvement serves to underline a scientific approach to problem solving coupled with step-by-step improvements to all work processes. Management by fact highlights the need for organizations to be data driven in so far as all decisions are determined from verifiable data collected over long periods of time. Process improvement focuses organizational activities on a process of quality improvement as opposed to an explicitly identifiable target. This approach encourages employees to think for themselves in terms of quality, as well as allaying the "traditional" tendency to lay the blame for quality defects squarely with management. Total participation is significant because it stresses the involvement of all individuals within the organization. Innovations in participation include the development of horizontal, cross-functional and vertical teams at all levels within the firm, making total quality a truly organizational effort. Total participation also has implications for the nature of shop floor supervision within the organization. In contrast to the traditionally defined role of the supervisor, total quality renders the supervisory role more facilitative in nature, with the result that employees are empowered to be more autonomous and responsible for the management of their own performances in support of continuous improvement.

Significant among the above considerations is the extent of shop floor involvement in the implementation of total quality. Their significance becomes all the more acute when viewed within the context of many recent prescriptions on HRM where the emphasis is on developing a devolved organization in which responsibility is pushed to line supervisors or "team leaders" at the point of production or service delivery. Equally held by HRM is the emphasis on an internal and external customer orientation within the firm where everyone is held mutually responsible for the production of a "quality" product or service until finally, the external customer is satisfied. In this way, the satisfaction of each internal "customer" within the firm represents the generation of an "added-value" contribution by each employee, giving them a sense of commitment and ownership of their role and stake in the organization (Sewell

and Wilkinson 1992a). Moreover, both HRM and TQM stress the importance of a strong corporate culture that will sustain the process of continuous improvement. This involves a change in prevailing attitudes within the firm in so far as employees are expected to internalize values that unequivocally promote quality, flexibility and added-value (Willmott 1993).

4. REFRAMING TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT

In the context of the above discussion, it could be suggested that TQM radically alters the strategic thrust of the organization in terms of its utilization of a firm's resources in support of a competitive advantage. More specifically, one could point to the manner in which "human" capital resources within the firm are transformed by total quality. No longer an extension of machine technology as per scientific management, the shop floor worker is operationally empowered by total quality to determine the nature and form of the task to be completed. Management in this instance is not concerned with the application of strictly overt controls, but rather with the promotion of conditions whereby the worker becomes personally responsible for the "quality" of work undertaken within their "empowerment" parameters. Yet in a more penetrating analysis, these attributes of quality can be shown to reveal an insidiously silent management control, a control that is cultivated in terms of human subjectivity, and which manifests itself in the fabric of social relationships within the organization (Downey 1995; Downey 1996). Because contemporary labour process analysis has attempted to come to terms with this phenomenon in an expository way (Knights and Willmott 1989; Sewell and Wilkinson 1992a, 1992b; Sturdy, Knights and Willmott 1992; Wilkinson and Willmott 1995), and has to some extent managed to penetrate the fundamentally unitarist ideology permeating many recent prescriptions on organizational change, this paper now directs its attention to the principles of labour process analysis, primarily to facilitate the development of an alternative theoretical perspective on total quality management.

5. THE NATURE OF THE CONTEMPORARY LABOUR PROCESS DEBATE

Perhaps the leading contemporary account of the labour process was documented in Harry Braverman's *Labour and Monopoly Capital* (1974). A seminal piece examining the nature and development of productive labour under modern regimes of capitalism, *Labour and Monopoly Capital* revived

considerable debate on the impact of labour process analysis on the study of capitalism and the organization of work. Retracing the position advocated by Marx (1904) in his critique of political economy, the principal tenet of Braverman's thesis concerned itself with the capitalist management objective of gaining control (Control, in this instance, concerns the disciplining of labour power in support of capital accumulation. The approach adopted by Braverman, in dealing with this issue, is consistent with orthodox Marxist ideology in that labour is held to submit itself to capitalism as an exchange commodity in return for a wage. This wage, embodied in the value of the commodity produced by labour, is lower than the exchange value received in the marketplace. The difference therefore between the wage and the exchange value constitutes profit for the capitalist, and thus serves to motivate the further appropriation of surplus value from labour. Given this scenario, the capitalist seeks to establish modes of production that will facilitate the accumulation of capital over time. A significant feature of this process has been the concern of capitalists to control the characteristic features of the labour process, and thus the manner in which capital, and the conditions of its reproduction, are maintained and consolidated.) over the labour process through the continual degradation of labour, with the result that tasks were deskilled, rendering the talents and creativity of the shop floor worker obsolete and expendable. In elaborating on how this deskilling is achieved, Braverman highlights how modern managements have deployed a battery of techniques associated with the scientific management of the firm in order to separate the conceptual and purposive aspects of the labour process from the routine execution of predetermined tasks (p. 100). On this basis, then, the conceptual phase of the labour process is removed from the province of the shop floor worker, and is assumed, in as much as scientific management facilitates, by modern firm management. By explaining the contemporary nature of the labour process in this way, Braverman shows how the subjective aspect of the labour process, as formerly expressed by labour before the advent of modern capitalistic modes of production, is reduced under scientific management to the status of an "object" that is a mere extension of technology, an expendable input in the capitalist production process (p. 180).

While Braverman succeeds in developing a deterministic link between the capitalist drive to appropriate the private accumulation of surplus value from the deskilling, degradation and hence control of the labour process, he does so by suggesting that capitalistic control is solely concerned with continually refining "working humanity" into instruments of capital accumulation (p. 139). Accordingly, the contribution of labour to the labour process is conceptualized by Braverman in an inanimate objectified way, leaving management as the

“sole subjective element” in the labour process under capitalistic regimes of production (p. 171). In refuting this point, Knights and Willmott (1989) argue that subjectivity should be more properly conceived as an “optional property of the person capable of being possessed or dispossessed, developed or left undeveloped” (p. 546). Developing reflections on this view of subjectivity, Knights and Willmott focus considerable attention on the labour process ethnography of Burawoy (1979), highlighting that despite its penetrative strength in illuminating the dialectic of capitalist-labour relations on the shop floor, it is limited by its failure to theorize the concept of social identity when accounting for the reproduction of capitalist social relations. Using an empirical approach, Burawoy presents full of insight evidence to suggest that the subjectivity of the labour process is not, contrary to Braverman, confined to the rarefied domain of management control. Moreover, in illustrating how the labour process is not solely concerned with the intensification and degradation of labour in support of capital accumulation, Burawoy identifies an alternative work strategy that challenges the fundamental thrust of Braverman’s thesis in terms of management control over the labour process. Elaborating on this, Burawoy (1979, p. 72) highlights the extent to which shop floor workers are accorded a relative degree of autonomy through an informal management strategy in which workers are made responsible for the “self-organization” of their work on a day-to-day basis. By engaging in what he describes as competitive “games” with their fellow workers, many of which are based on the speed that productivity bonuses can be maximized, Burawoy explains how shop floor workers manage to maintain and to some extent increase their productivity without the overt control of a belligerent management presence. Thus, because management does not utilize their hierarchical prerogative to exercise control over the labour process in a formal way, much of the fundamental conflict of interest between capital and labour is translated and diffused into lateral antagonisms between fellow workers on the shop floor (p. 63). By engaging in these competitive “games” with each other – a process termed by Burawoy as “making-out” – workers derive a sense of well-being and independence, making up for an otherwise routine and repressive working environment. On this point, Knights and Willmott (1989) underline the extent to which the labour process manages to individualize workers on the shop floor, separating them off from one another and turning them back on themselves (p. 548). Accordingly, the labour process can be viewed as a “game” in which workers unintentionally consent their subjective labour power to capitalist managements in their drive to secure surplus value. Moreover, while

workers consent their co-operation to capitalism, they do so in a way that actively reproduces the production relations that will sustain their continual subordination.

Despite the empirical insights afforded by Burawoy's account of the labour process as it is "worked" on the ground, the theorization of the relationship between subjectivity and the organization of work has remained a relatively unexplored avenue of academic investigation. Nevertheless, a number of prominent labour process theorists have attempted to throw some light on the amorphous nature of subjectivity in the workplace, drawing much of their inspiration from the work of the French philosopher, Michel Foucault (Knights and Willmott 1989; Sakolsky 1992; Sewell and Wilkinson 1992a, 1992b). The fundamental thrust of Foucault's (1979) thesis in respect of subjectivity concerns the extent to which it embraces disciplinary mechanisms, techniques of surveillance and power/knowledge strategies. His concern with subjectivity rejects the contemporary Marxist notion of power as a transcendental mechanism derived from a capitalist compulsion to accumulate surplus value (Sakolsky 1992). In a more polyvalent way, Foucault conceptualizes power in terms of the self-subjugation of the labouring subject through the deployment of a self-disciplinary subjectivity. Subjectivity in this sense is not to be regarded as that "personal space" or "creative autonomy" that has not yet been captured by political economy (Knights and Willmott 1989, p. 549). On this basis, then, the individual labouring subject, although capable of expressing their subjectivity in any number of ways, will engage in a self-disciplined process of identifying with those practices and rituals that will provide them with a sense of security, purpose and belonging (*ibid.*). By engaging in such a process, labouring subjects can overcome the social isolation that results from their individualization by the labour process on the shop floor. Thus, by expanding on the use of Foucault's conception of subjectivity and power relations, it becomes reasonably clear as to why Burawoy (1979) characterizes the labour process in terms of competitive "games" between workers on the shop floor. Workers engage in this behaviour because it provides them with a sense of importance and competence, enabling them to derive a definition of self that is psychologically removed from the deprivation and monotony that otherwise characterizes their work environment. More fundamentally, though, their behaviour inadvertently reproduces the conditions of their subordination to capitalism (*ibid.*). Taking this debate into the context of total quality management, the following section examines the labour process in terms of its manifest implications on the shop floor.

6. TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND THE LABOUR PROCESS

In describing the seductive nature of quality programmes, Kerfoot and Knights (1995, p. 221) highlight that the "fit" between quality programmes and the labour process has less to do with the direct control of labour than with assisting in the management of certain problems concerning competitive capitalism. On this basis, then, it is a truism to suggest that total quality management is first and foremost a strategic tool used in the generation of competitive advantage. Yet, while TQM variously involves technological process modifications in its implementation, it also directly and covertly utilizes a number of processes to socially and psychologically modify workforce beliefs, attitudes and values in support of continuous improvement, and in more fundamental terms, capital accumulation. In this way, the management of corporate culture becomes a key consideration in effecting successful programmes of TQM. However, the manner in which this is achieved raises a number of significant issues on the implications of such programmes for the workforce, particularly in respect of the self-disciplinary subjectivity that is employed by labouring subjects within the contemporary labour process.

7. EMPOWERMENT, TEAMWORK AND THE "PANOPTIC GAZE"

If a degree of responsibility is ceded to the shop floor in term of employee empowerment, as advocated in both the TQM and HRM literature, in what form does it present itself within the context of the labour process debate? As mentioned earlier, the total quality organization is one where all employees are held to be committed to the process of continuous improvement. Central to the generation of this commitment is the degree to which shop floor workers are accorded greater freedom in influencing the conditions under which they work. As such, the "empowerment" culture of the shop floor represents a significant departure from the highly circumscribed workplace regime associated with the scientific management of the firm. In contrast to scientific management regimes where workers are compelled to perform their tasks within tightly defined task parameters prescribed by management, total quality is held to promote a climate of production relations that fosters the involvement and participation of workers in key devolved organizational decisions on the shop floor. By doing so, organizations highlight the extent to which they can tap the skill, energy and knowledge potential of those who are closest to the work itself (Webb and Bryant 1993). Yet despite the obvious positive attractions to some people of adopting such an approach, the nature and extent of employee empowerment

becomes questionable when one considers how different it really is to traditional scientific management techniques.

As total quality approaches emphasize the importance of continuous process improvement (or *kaizen*) in their successful implementation, the "never-ending" characteristic of such an approach suggests that, in so far as quality is concerned, organizations are continually driven to transform themselves, generating further improvements as they do so. As *kaizen* does not accept optimal improvement levels, firms are driven to push beyond the confines of existing levels, defining new standards to be improved upon in the future. Thus where the scientific management of the firm is concerned with determining the "one best way" of performing a task, *kaizen* is compelled to seek out extraordinary improvements in excess of perceived optimality. As Boje and Windsor (1993, p.61) point out:

"because the *kaizen* system of "continual improvement" requires a programme of standards which are measurable and reducible, work tasks become meticulously regulated and enforced in a manner which is indistinguishable from scientific management."

In other words, *kaizen* inadvertently becomes a refined, but obsessive form of scientific management. To suggest, then, that it represents a radical transformation in terms of methodology can be viewed as wholly misleading, if not downright fallacious. To put it bluntly, *kaizen* merely re-packages scientific management in a way that is more appealing to both management and workforce. This view of continuous improvement thus turns many of the perceived benefits of empowerment upside down, primarily because it illustrates how empowerment manages to covertly intensify the labour process with the tacit approval of the workforce. Yet in examining where precisely the autonomy and responsibility of the empowered worker resides, one can further penetrate beneath the alluring veneer that surrounds empowerment, particularly in terms of teamwork and self-surveillance.

In promoting strategies that elicit the "commitment" of the workforce, Walton (1985) asserts the importance of teams, as opposed to individuals, in becoming the "organizational units" responsible for generating improved performances. Thus the individual worker is not the focus of attention, but rather represents part of a wider effort used in securing business objectives. As a way of organizing work, then, the team represents a self-managing unit, empowered with a multiplicity of skills specific to its task requirements. It possesses a strong sense of self, is highly motivated, and is capable of moderating the behaviours of its members to the extent that they conform to a commonly held standard. Because teams in themselves can be viewed as "mini organizations" with their own customer needs to satisfy within the wider context of the firm, they assume the devolved responsibility of organizational

management activity with an attendant discretion over such decisions as methods of work, task schedules, and assignment of members to different tasks (Manz and Sims 1987). In this context, job enrichment and job enlargement become defining characteristics of teamwork where an emphasis on multiskilling renders the team flexible in the event of there being absentee team members or a general slowdown in team production. Yet despite these virtues, Sewell and Wilkinson (1992a) found in the shop floor experience of total quality in one organization, how team self-management existed in so far as it concerned task deployment and quality assurance. Management, they found, maintained the responsibility for establishing overall production norms within the firm. In terms of team self-discipline, Sewell and Wilkinson highlight how group norms and peer pressure are controlled in an insidiously silent way by management through prominent displays of individual and team performance levels on the shop floor. As an example, they point to the introduction of "traffic light" card systems designed to alert team members of the difficulties experienced by peers not adhering to the standards imposed by the team. In terms of the effects such systems have on team behaviour, they quote one member as saying "... no one likes to have a red card hanging above their head but it's when you see other people with red cards when yours is green that it really gets to you" (ibid., p.109). Moreover, there are public displays of attendance information, making it potentially humiliating for those members who are not pulling their weight by their absence. In this context, then, it becomes reasonably clear as to why multiskilling is necessary (ibid., p.104). Indeed multiskilling additionally enables those members who finish their task before the cycle time has elapsed to assist those who are not so quick to finish. As Boje and Windsor (1993) underline, this method overcomes the traditional shortcomings of the regulated pace of the assembly line by eliminating every possible rest period from the workers's programme of tasks, making every spare moment, therefore, productive and controllable.

Complementing the social influence factor, individual team members are of themselves involved in a process of self-surveillance. On this point, Sewell and Wilkinson (1992b) illustrate how the delegation of responsibility associated with HRM, in the context of total quality, does not of itself diminish the surveillance capability of management. Drawing on Foucault's (1979) work on discipline and punishment, they explain how the Panoptican – an eighteenth century conception of a circular prison with a central observation tower – is constructed in such a way as to enable an observer to gaze directly into every cell of the prison without the reciprocal possibility of the prisoner ever seeing the observer. They additionally highlight how each prisoner is shut off from contact with any other inmates – a process known as *sequestration* (or

separation) – rendering the individual prisoner confined, constantly visible, and in a perfectly individualized state. While never fully realized in practice, the principles of panopticism have been generalized to embrace the construction and operation of social institutions where the control of human activity has been required (*ibid.*, p. 273). As Foucault (1979, p.201) originally put it:

“... the major effect of the Panopticon [is] to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary; that this architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it; in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers.”

In abstracting therefore from the potential implications of the panoptic “gaze”, Sewell and Wilkinson (1992a) highlight how this approach can be applied within the context of the socialized production relations of the labour process. Thus if scientific management represents the strict application of the Panopticon in terms of breaking tasks down into their smallest constituent units, making individual workers separately responsible for the execution of each of these units, then, the necessary job enlargements of the team-based labour process requires a more sophisticated form of panoptic surveillance, one that embraces the notion of “empowerment” (1992a, p. 109). Here Sewell and Wilkinson point to the work of Zuboff (1988) concerning what is termed the “Information Panopticon”. The electronic surveillance afforded by the Information Panopticon thus presents management with an informative mechanism that cuts right to the heart of the labour process, providing on-line information on the performance of the team when required. In this context, team members – as labouring subjects on the shop floor – become acutely aware of their continuous scrutiny by management, with the result that they internalize the “gaze” of the Information Panopticon. This is achieved by inculcating the supervisory discipline of an otherwise imposing management presence, rendering the physical presence of management unnecessary (1992a, p. 109). Coupled with the influence of peer-pressure devices such as the imposition of sanctions on deviant team members, self-surveillance represents a powerful disciplinary mechanism that insidiously engages the subjectivity of the “empowered” workforce in support of continuous improvement.

8. TQM AND CORPORATE CULTURE

The 1980s marked the emergence of “excellence” and “corporate culture” as bywords for sustainable competitive advantage (Barney, 1986). Although a seductive and slippery philosophy of management with subtle

and nebulous attributes that are not readily identifiable in practice, the management of culture assumed a significant stronghold on contemporary management practice primarily because of its focus on the "core values" of the corporation. By taking the view that culture is an organizational variable within the domain of management control, much of the literature on culture generally demonstrate how management can directly and intentionally determine the key beliefs, attitudes and values of their employees in line with those held by management themselves (Peters and Waterman 1982; Deal and Kennedy 1982). Thus as a cornerstone of total quality management, the ideology of corporate culture presents an additional insidious technique in the management of the modern labour process. By managing culture, therefore, management attempt to wholly influence the subjectivity of individuals within the context of the firm by subjecting them to a programme of inculcation that unquestionably requires their absolute commitment to the values of the organization. As such, individual labouring subjects become indoctrinated to the extent that all forms of possible resistance are negated by their conformance. As Willmott (1993, p. 534) puts it:

"... corporate culture programmes are designed to deny or frustrate the development of conditions in which critical reflection is fostered. They commend the homogenization of norms and values within the organization. Employees are selected and promoted on the basis of their (perceived) acceptance of, receptivity to the core values."

Yet by returning at this point to the earlier discussion on the self-subjugation of the labouring subject through the deployment of what Knights and Willmott (1989) refer to as a "self-disciplinary" subjectivity, it becomes reasonably clear as to how corporate culture manages to engage this subjectivity in support of continuous improvement. By identifying with those practices and rituals associated with the corporate culture of the organization, individual employees can derive the sense of purpose, belonging and security as theorized by Knights and Willmott (1989). However, despite this self-subjective feeling of identification, employees can still be considered as fundamentally controlled by capitalism to the extent that they actively contribute to their own subordination under capital accumulation.

9. CONCLUSION

This paper has identified and explained the nature and implications of total quality management within the context of the contemporary labour process debate. Having identified the underlying rationale for total quality approaches, the core features of quality management were discussed in

terms of their implications for the organization of work. The development of the labour process under modern regimes of capital accumulation was also considered, with particular reference to the writings of Braverman (1974) and Burawoy (1979). Braverman's interpretation pointed to a "deterministic" relationship between capital and the labour process. His notion of capitalistic control was one that was derived fundamentally from the compulsion of capitalism to objectify and control all variables within its domain, including labour. Burawoy, on the other hand, challenges Braverman's thesis in terms of how workers consent their labour to the capitalist mode of production. By identifying the extent of informal discretion afforded to the workforce by management, he illustrates how the workforce engages in "making-out", with the result that any hierarchical conflict between management and workforce is laterally diverted and expressed within the workforce itself. In identifying that Burawoy, arguably, has failed to theorize why workers willingly consent their labour to capitalism, Knights and Willmott (1989) advance the labour process debate further by drawing on Foucauldian analysis to demonstrate that individual labouring subjects on the shop floor employ a self-disciplinary subjectivity that directs them to identify with the organization as an institution that gives them a sense of purpose, security and belonging. By subsequently taking total quality management into the province of labour process analysis, the paper sought to explain how self-disciplinary subjectivity is insidiously deployed as an appendage of management control within the core of the "total quality" labour process. Specifically, control was shown to manifest itself within the context of teamwork and self-surveillance, while the management of corporate culture – although a more consciously systematic management approach – afforded the necessary "framework" to capture much of what is informal, intuitive and irrational about the contemporary organization of work. A final summary issue, then, concerns the extent the "total quality" labour process departs from traditional views on the labour process. The key consideration here is the strategic orientation of total quality. Thus while TQM represents a consciously strategic approach to the organization of work on the shop floor, it legitimates much of the individualist competitive behaviour deployed by the workforce – as identified by Burawoy (1979) – within a context of teamwork and self-surveillance. The potential capacity for the workforce therefore to engage in "making out" is tapped by TQM in support of its strategic drive for continuous improvement, and in key commercial terms, capital accumulation.

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