The Value of Existential Forms of Reflection for the Practices of Managers: A Hedieggerian Perspective

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THE VALUE OF EXISTENTIAL FORMS OF REFLECTION FOR THE PRACTICES OF MANAGERS: A HEDIEGGERIAN PERSPECTIVE

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the value of a Heideggerian concept of reflective practice for managers. It begins by demonstrating that there is a turn towards reflection in the theory and practice of management. It situates the discussion of Heidegger’s notion of reflection in the context of Adult Education theories of reflection. It shows that both see critical incidents or disruptions as occasions for reflection. It brings out the distinctive contribution that a Heideggerian perspective makes towards the value of critical incidents for reflection, showing how Heidegger outlines the role of mood in the relationship between critical incidents and reflection and how he sees new opportunities as dwelling at the centre of the danger of critical incidents. It demonstrates that reflection is an important opportunity for managers to develop and transform their practices. It shows how managers need to develop what Heidegger calls a resolute authentic attunement to experiences of disruption in order to turn them into learning opportunities. It uses critical incidents in the leadership experience of Steve Waugh and the management experience of Andrew Grove to exemplify the Heideggerian thesis.

Key words:
Heidegger, disruption, critical incident, reflection, explicit, mood, authenticity, anxiety

As exemplified in management writers such as Henry Mintzberg (2004) and Tony Watson (2006) there is a turn towards reflective practice in management education. However, as a number of Adult Education authors inform us the process of turning a management practice into an explicit theme of reflection is not elementary and should not be taken for granted. This, as we shall see, is because we are embedded in our practices in such a way that our management practices are implicit and not always explicit to us. For the most part we are involved in and absorbed in our practices such that we do not catch sight of them. How do we become aware of our management practices such that they become themes of reflection?

This paper will demonstrate how the philosophy of Martin Heidegger as developed in his book *Being and Time* (1985) provides a framework for enabling what is implicit in a manager’s practice to be made explicit in such a way that the practice becomes a theme for reflection, questioning and where necessary transformation. Using the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, this paper will demonstrate how what Heidegger calls “disruptions” or “disturbances” in a manager’s practice become the opportunity for reflection on practice. The implication of the Heideggerian perspective, as will be demonstrated, is that crisis is
an opportunity for reflection, and that reflection is an occasion upon which to see and do things in new ways. Heidegger maintains that the emotional or existential triggers for reflection are an experience of danger and that reflection occurs where a person can embrace rather than refuse the danger. Indeed, as will be shown, from the Heideggerian perspective, it is in the context of the disruption of crisis that the busy manager has the opportunity to become a reflective manager. This is because crisis transforms the mood or attunement of the manager in such a way that it calls them to stand back, or in Heideggerian terms to “withdraw” (1968:58) from the “busy-ness” of their day to day involvement and absorption in their management practice such that they “draw towards” (1968:58) an explicit awareness of their management practice. The experience of simultaneously withdrawing from being absorbed in one’s management practice and drawing towards an explicit awareness of the practice in the experience of crisis is the moment of creative destruction in the Heideggerian philosophy. It is the phenomenology of the experience of re-inventing the manager’s way of being. Although this essay will not touch on this point, it is also the basis of the Heideggerian description of Joseph Schumpeter’s (1955) description of the entrepreneur.

The paper shall be divided into the following sections. In the first section I will outline the theme of the growing importance of reflective practice in management. In section 2, I will develop an Heideggerian concept of reflective practice by situating in the context of Adult Education theories of reflection. I will show how a Heideggerian understanding of disruption makes explicit the way in which a manager’s practice becomes an explicit theme of reflection. In section 3, I will use two examples to demonstrate the Heideggerian process. I will draw on the leadership experience of Steve Waugh and the management experience of Andrew Grove of Intel to illustrate the Heideggerian process.

II

The relationship between theory and practice has been problematic in management. In this regard it is interesting to see Steers and Porters (1996) perplexity when at the end of their book on leadership and motivation, they make a point that potentially undermines their approach to management education. They notice that even though their work is well researched, leaders and managers in practice do not make use of their research. Instead, they say, managers and leaders tend to maintain conservative beliefs about employees. Whereas their research shows that employees want to be engaged and take the initiative, Steers and Porter maintain that in practice many managers continue to believe that workers are lazy and indifferent and treat them as such. They are perplexed and conclude their book by asking: why is it that their research may be scientifically convincing in the academic setting but not in the practical context of managers?

In fact without knowing it they answer there own question because they go on to show that research is concerned with “data” abstracted from experience whereas practice is concerned with decision making in the context of experience. A similar question has been raised in the context of teacher education. Making this point in the context of pre-service teachers entering service for the first time, Herman Widlack writes of what he calls the “real-life shock” experienced by teachers in the transition from university based training to
the contingent reality of the classroom. He claims that newly qualified teachers often respond to the trauma of transition “by a change in attitude from one which is university based, progressive and liberal to one which is conservative.” He also notes that this shock manifests itself in experiences of teacher helplessness, insecurity and a general loss of proportion and perspective which expresses itself in scepticism towards theory in which newly qualified teachers are advised to "Just forget what you have learnt." (1980:23)

Here we see quite clearly how the uncertainty of the contingent reality of the classroom can transform the explicit "progressive and liberal" beliefs of pre-service teachers to the "conservative" practices of teachers in the "chalk face." Practices are formed, as Argyris and Schon, note under "real-time conditions," (1977:4) conditions in which teachers have to come to terms with the risk of failure, feelings of helplessness and uncertainties. Argyris and Schon question the relationship between research and practice, noting that research is done under ideal time conditions while effective action occurs under real time conditions: “The old ideal of a working relationship between research and practice has yet to be realised. The technology of rigorous research works best when it does not deal with real-time issues – for example, when scholars take years to study a decision that took several hours to make. This technology … is based on diagnostic techniques that ignore … the properties of effective action under real-time conditions.” (1977:3)

Whereas research occurs in the safety of ideal time conditions, practice occurs in the uncertainty of real time conditions. As MacDonald has said: “What if [managers], recognizing the uncertainty in their work? And what if theorists recognized that intimate knowledge of this uncertainty was exactly what was missing from both their theories and the policies these theories provoke?” (1986:36)

It is in the context of the mismatch between theory and practice that educators have turned towards reflective practice, believing that reflection in practice allows for the possibility of theorising under the real time conditions of the workplace and classroom, working with issues of teacher and manager uncertainty rather than overriding them as variables that influence the practices of managers and teachers. Indeed based on insights drawn from psychoanalysis and other forms of psychotherapeutic knowledge, uncertainty has come to function as a key catalyst to reflection. Furthermore within the broad framework of adult education there is a growing awareness of the need to develop practices of critical thinking, and reflexive processes of thought through which to guide and enable managers to reflect on and deconstruct the assumptions and beliefs that underpin their own everyday experiences, that is, instead of only learning the theories of the expert researchers, it is seen as crucial that managers learn to understand their own implicit assumptions about management.

In the context of management Henry Mintzberg has been an advocate of the need to turn towards reflective practice in management education. He believes that everything a manager does is caught between theory and practice. As Gosling and Mintzberg claim: “Everything that every effective manager does is sandwiched between action on the ground and reflection in the abstract. Action without reflection is thoughtless; reflection
without action is passive. Every manager has to find a way to combine these two mindsets - to function at the point where reflective thinking meets practical doing.” (2003:31)

Mintzberg notes that while classical MBA management education has claimed to distinguish itself by turning away from theory to practice, the very concept of practice is still an abstraction. He claims that the case study classroom in management was designed to bring real life experience into the classroom but it in fact repeats the very problem it was designed to overcome. He claims that at best case studies have the appearance of being experiential but are in fact thinly disguised abstractions. For we must not confuse the analysis of cases with reflection on experience. Cases present experience in an already written up form, a form that has a perspective already embedded in it. When management students analyse cases they are not analysing experiences but the representation of experiences and management educators and students have tended to confuse the representation of experiences with the experience themselves. Just because cases represent an experience does not mean that they are the experience. Furthermore the analyses of case studies are based on cognitive skills of analysis whereas “real life” experience requires skills of perception – not only of cognition. In case studies, he claims, “Words are life reduced to categories.” This is because words take on meaning “only when they are embedded in the rich experience of life, the world beyond the executive office and case classroom.” The case study classroom presents the data of a case “while tacit knowledge of the situation is absent and so ignored.” Pointing to the importance of contextual knowledge he says: “Managers have to sense things; they have to weave their way through complex phenomena.” (2004: 52-53)

The italics are my own. The question that I am concerned with is what kind of knowledge or understanding emerges out of the process of managers “weaving their way” through complex phenomenon? It is obviously an experientially based knowledge but, as Mintzberg notes, it is on this dimension that the classic MBA education is lacking. Experience is made up of much more than words on paper. It does not present itself to us as neatly packaged and wrapped. It does not define itself for us. We have to define it: “As the chief executive of a pharmaceutical company told a group of MBA students, ‘my problem is that when I face a problem, I don’t know what class I’m in.” (2004:49)

How then do we turn an experience into a theme of reflection? How do we make the implicit explicit such that we can think about it, challenge our ways of doing things and transform them where necessary? Of course before answering this question, the importance of reflection in management needs to be questioned: should managers ever want to make explicit their implicit assumptions governing their practices? Indeed, given the common sense view that management is largely a “pragmatic” activity in which managers are concerned with getting on with the job, which manager has time to reflect on their practices? Yet, as well documented in the field of executive coaching, managers and executives do undergo experiences of “derailment” in which their habitual assumptions about management, about organizations and about their taken for granted perspective of themselves as managers are undermined.
From the perspective of Martin Heidegger, it is precisely in the emotional-existential experience of derailment that managers find themselves in a questioning relationship to themselves as managers, to their management practices and to the organizational context in which their practices are situated. Derailment is not the only emotional experience of turning away from being involved in a practice to questioning the practice; any worry, doubt, sense that something is not quite right or sense of confusion is, from the Heideggerian perspective an occasion upon which managers find themselves questioning their way of doing things or the way in which things “get done around here.”

It would fly in the face of common sense to maintain that such disruptions are not woven into the very fabric of management and organizational life. Although Fredric Taylor and other proponents of scientific management may have wanted to eliminate contingency from organizational activity, it is precisely with recognition that not only organizational life but with recognition that contingency is embedded in the very fabric of human existence itself that existential philosophy and psychology is concerned. Indeed many of the major themes of existentialism concern the nature of the contingency of being, beginning with Heidegger’s exploration of time or temporality, death, explored in existential anxiety, choice and resolve under conditions of adversity. Furthermore, from the Heideggerian perspective the experience of contingency is not itself a contingent event but of the essence of human existence. The value of contingency is that in the shudder of its grasp the human being withdraws from its everyday concerns in such a way that it develops an explicit and questioning relationship to these concerns.

From the Heideggerian perspective, it is in the shudder of contingency that managers are drawn towards making their practices as managers, their individual selves as managers and the organizational context in which they manage explicit themes of concern. It is, for example, in the moment of being retrenched, the experience of a “personality clash” at work, a failed project, an unexpected mistake, a disruption generated by organizational change that the possibility of reflection arises. These are contingencies that are essential to the work place. In so far as this is true and in so far as contingencies form the existential and emotional grounds of reflection, reflection on practice is central to the workplace. Indeed, this point can be taken one step further: whether they know it or not when managers are engaged in a shudder of contingency they are drawn into the space of and opportunity for reflection. The conditions under which to seize on the opportunity for reflection is an issue that will be explored in this essay.

The importance of reflection is made all the more urgent by the fact that a manager’s beliefs and assumptions are all too often invisible and taken for granted in their management experience. Indeed while engaged in the activity of managing, managers are not explicitly drawn to their views of management and the way in which it shapes their attitudes, attunement and behaviour as a manager. They are too busy managing to be concerned with their views of management and thus with how their taken for granted assumptions about management, human beings, relationships and being in an organization are governing the way in which they manage. Tony Watson brings this point out well in his ethnographic studies on managers when he shows that it is only when managers are invited into thinking about their experience as managers that they begin to
make explicit for themselves their views of managers. As one example, he describes the case of a nursing sister who manages a ward and has no prior awareness of the way in which she values relationships in management until Watson begins to question her regarding her practice as a manager. Only then does she become aware of the value of relationships in management. (Watson:10)

Paradoxically for the most part we are too busy doing to see our own way of doing. As Stephen Brookfield has said: “because of the ingrained, internalized nature of assumptions, they are almost too obvious” to be seen. (1990:193) Brookfield contends that in order to identify our assumptions we need to reflect on “critical incidents” (1990:197) in our own lives. These critical incidents, he believes, will allow us to critically reflect on that which we habitually take for granted in our experiences. Jack Mezirow develops a similar view of critical reflection. He maintains that what he calls “disorientating dilemmas” (1990:13) rupture our complacency in such a way that they make our habitually taken-for-granted assumptions an explicit theme of reflective questioning. He believes that “disorientating dilemmas” such as death of a loved one or divorce “become catalysts or ‘trigger events’ that precipitate critical reflection and transformations”. Mezirow uses Kuhn’s notion of paradigm anomalies to develop the logic of the disorientating dilemma, maintaining that “Our meaning schemes may be transformed through reflection on anomalies” (1990:13).

Heidegger makes explicit the process whereby a critical incident opens up the opportunity for reflection. He claims that in any critical incident there is a simultaneous withdrawal from the immediacy of being involved and absorbed in the everyday world of busy-ness and activity and a drawing towards an explicit awareness of the world in which we are involved. It is the play on simultaneously drawing away from and drawing towards that is essential to Heidegger: “What withdraws from us, draws us along by its very withdrawal, whether or not we become aware of it immediately, or at all. Once we are drawn into the withdrawal, we are drawing towards what draws us, our essential nature already bears the stamp of "drawing toward." (1968:58) As we are drawing toward what withdraws, we ourselves are pointers pointing toward it.

Withdrawal from our practices means letting go of the day to day busy-ness of being involved in our practices. Drawing towards them means looking at the very way of being busy in our practices. Whilst we are busily involved in our practices we are not aware of the busy-ness of the practices that we are involved in. We need to “withdraw” from the practice in order to reflect on it or, in Heideggerian terms “draw towards” it: “this "drawing toward" is in itself an essential and therefore constant pointing toward what withdraws. To say "drawing toward" is to say "pointing toward what withdraws." (1968:59)

Withdrawal should not be thought of in a negative light but is the existential experience underpinning the process of “stepping back” which is seen as critical to reflection. When we reflect on our activity we step back from it. We step back from what we are involved in. Heidegger is using the concept of withdrawal to describe the emotional experience that occurs in those moments that critical incidents invite us to step back from our
practices. For in stepping back we need to let go of our practice and our activities. But, for Heidegger as we step back from the busy-ness of our practice we simultaneously become attentive to our busy practices. It is important to note that what Heidegger is describing is not the concept of reflection but reflection as an experience. From Heidegger’s perspective just as we have an experience of eating an apple, working for a manager, so reflection is also a form of experience. “Stepping back” from our practices to examine them is underpinned by the emotional experience of withdrawing from and drawing towards our practices.

It is crucial to bear in mind that it is in critical incidents that we tend to withdraw from the day to day involvement in our practices – in moments of derailment for example. From the Heideggerian perspective it is not the case that critical incidents lead to or causes reflection, that is, it is not the case that a person first experiences a critical incident and then reflects on it. There is a much more direct relationship between the critical incident and reflection. They are elements of the same phenomenon. The very shudder experienced in a critical incident is the mood essential to reflection. Once we shudder, we have, from the Heideggerian perspective, withdrawn from being simply involved and absorbed in the everyday world of our practices to a position in which we are emotionally and existentially detached from our practices. Once we are, for example, derailed in our management practices, we are already detached from our practice. It is not that we are first derailed and then become detached. The derailment and detachment are part of the same event. We are not first derailed and then asking “what the hell is going on around here?” The derailment and the phrasing of the question are part of the same event.

However, there is a further complication in the Heideggerian perspective on the relationship between disruption and reflection. While critical incidents, derailments or disruptions are necessary, they are not sufficient conditions for reflection. It is well known in existential psychological and philosophical literature that critical incidents can lead to a defensive rather than reflective response. Indeed, for Heidegger the primary critical incident, the experience of existential anxiety may be so overwhelming that a person seeks to escape it by dwelling in what he calls the inauthentic lostness of the everyday. One of the ways in which inauthenticity manifests itself for Heidegger is in the form of doing things in a particular way because it is the acceptable way in which things get done around here. In an inauthentic mode of being we do things because others do them in this way. We follow what “they” do – the “crowd mentality.” In the context of management, this form of inauthenticity has been critiqued in the name of following a fad: we do “six sigma,” TQM, “participative management,” or what ever happens to be the fashion of the day because “they” do it in this way. Commenting on following things because “they” follow them Heidegger says: “We take pleasure and enjoy ourselves as they take pleasure; we read, see and judge about literature as they see and judge; …we find shocking what they find shocking. The they, which is nothing definite, and which all are, though not as a sum, prescribes the kind of being of everydayness.” (1985:165)

It is crucial that inauthenticity is not a reflection of six sigma or TQM as such but of our relationship to it, that is, adopting it because it is “said” by our competitors, customers and the market place that it is “the right thing” to do and we are too afraid to miss out.
We analyse things in this way because “they” (1985:165) analyse things in this way. We use Porters model of analysis because “they” use it. Mathew Stewart has critiqued MBA programs for promoting this form of inauthenticity: “What they don’t seem to teach you in business school are that the ‘five forces’ and ‘the seven C’s’ are heuristics: they can lead you to solutions but they cannot make you think.” (2006:87) Indeed, “they” do not teach students to think about why these models are being adopted in the first place and so students tend to apply these models because “they” (experts or the gurus of the business school) have promoted these as the models to be applied.

Stewart offers the following anecdotal example of the inauthenticity sheep like mentality of an MBA graduate applying Porters model: “I once sat through a presentation in which a consultant, a Harvard MBA graduate showed a client, the manager of a large financial institution in a developing country, how the client company’s ‘competitive advantage’ could be analysed in terms of the ‘five forces.’ He even used a graphic borrowed directly from guru-of-the-moment Michael Porter’s best selling work on ‘competitive strategy.’ Not for the first time, I was embarrassed to call myself a consultant. As it happens, the client, too, had a Harvard MBA. “No” he said, shaking his head with feigned chagrin. ‘There are only three forces in this case. And two ate in the Finance Ministry.” (2006:87)

Whereas inauthenticity is a failure to think for ourselves, Heidegger refers to authenticity as an “individualising” (1985: 232) moment in which we stand outside of the crowd, are freed from domination by taken for granted common sense, and, in the moment of being without the support of others or common sense, are challenged to reflect on a disruption or critical incident for ourselves. An example of authenticity through individualizing is described by Ricardo Semler when faced with a crisis in running SEMCO, the organization which he inherited from his father. As he maintains, his initial response to the crisis was “inauthentic” in that he sought to adopt the latest fads and to higher consultants to manage the crisis for him. He and his colleagues tried all the gurus on the circuit. They imported change methodologies from all over the world but none of them worked: “I tried all the pre-packaged ideas I could find, scouring every business book with a title that began with ‘How to …’ … but I just couldn’t make them work in our office or factories.”(1993:53)

Only as he took responsibility for the problem could he think through it: “I began to suspect that SEMCO’s problems went deeper than I realised.” (1993:53) The more he realised how deep SEMCO’s problems went, the more he owned them and the less he attempted to rely on a pre-packaged formula to deal with them. He was willing to stand alone and do things in his own way, questioning established tradition and common sense in both the “running” and “leading” of organizations. Through the individualizing process of standing alone outside of the crowd of common sense in a moment of anxiety, he developed a way of organizing and leading SEMCO that many others have sought to adopt as their own! He did not have a formula or method in advance of standing alone. It was only by standing alone that he developed a way of doing things. However, from a Heideggerian perspective the more other organizations seek to adopt SEMCO’s way of doing things, the more they fall into the trap of inauthenticity and the less they develop their way of doing things. Semler was authentic because he did not seek to follow the
“correct” or the “others” way of doing things but because he embraced the challenge of staying, in the anxiety of a critical incident or disruption, without a method or way of doing things. To put it in the form of a cliché, he did not seek to escape the anxiety of being without a method or way of doing things but really thought for himself.

It is this moment of being able to stand within the anxiety of a critical incident that is decisive in the difference between an authentic and inauthentic response to the disruption. Boards or managers who seek to hire consultants to escape the anxiety of a disruption or critical incident are in an inauthentic mode of being. The price of this, from the Heideggerian perspective is not a moral reprimand but paralysis of action and reinforcing of confusion. For the more managers seek to escape anxiety through the way “they” do things or by hiring consultants to deal with their critical incidents, the more they cease to be authors of their own possibilities and thus the less authoritative they become.

It is important to note that in Heidegger the term individualizing is used as a verb and not as a noun. It does not describe a thing but an activity. Heidegger does not subscribe to the Cartesian notion that the human being has the ontological status of an individual. There is for Heidegger no such “being” as an individual. Rather for Heidegger the human being becomes individualized when in moments of disruption, derailment or critical incidents, it stands out from the crowd, does not rely on the taken for granted common sense attunement of the crowd and through questioning the way in which “they” do things, begins to develop not its self but its way of being in the world. Heidegger identifies Socrates as the hero of the authentic journey. For Socrates embraced the anxiety and uncertainty of standing outside of the boundaries of common sense as the basis upon which to make explicit, question and transform the habitual way of doing things of Athenian society. He saw himself as a midwife giving birth to new ways of doing things. He did this by questioning habitual ways of doing things. He questioned habitual ways by dwelling in the authentic mode of being individualized. Describing Socrates Heidegger says: “All through his life and right into his death, Socrates did nothing else than place himself into this draft, this current, and maintain himself in it. This is why he is the purest thinker of the West. This is why he wrote nothing.” (1968, 17)

Socrates was what Heidegger called “resolved.” Resolved for Heidegger does not refer to simply being single minded. It means being able to stand firm in the anxiety of the unknown. Socrates was resolved because he placed himself in the draft and thought about the customs and conventions of life from a position in which he had nothing to take for granted; nothing to give him the security of focus or direction. Yet he stood firm in the uncertainty of the unknown. He did not pretend that he was not in the unknown but he did not sink in the unknown. In the language of current leadership theory, resolve requires the paradoxical combination of what Jim Collins calls the humility and fierce determination of “Level 5 Leaders.”(2001) For it is this combination that allows such leaders to learn by embracing the anxiety of their critical incidents.

There is one point that needs to be refined before concluding this section. It is important to emphasise that for Heidegger that although disruption or critical incidence are conditions of making implicit practices explicit and being made explicit is a condition for
reflection and questioning, not all forms of being made explicit through critical incidents and disruptions lead to questioning and reflection on practices. On the contrary being made explicit through disruption may also lead to an idealization of or nostalgia for the disrupted practice. On a macro level this is often the case in the politics of nationalism where those who have been uprooted yearn for a “golden age” of the nation that has long ago faded away. Disruption may also lead to all forms of wining, winging and discontent about the way things “used to be done around here.” This is often the case where an organization restructures its ways of doing things. Such restructuring disrupts the ways in which things get done around here and thus makes them explicit. To wine or winge about something means that something has become an explicit theme of concern but not in a reflective or questioning attunement. Rather wining or winging are inauthentic responses to disruption because there is a tendency towards blaming others and idealization of old but disrupted ways of doing things.

In order to turn winging and wining into opportunities for reflection on practice the resolute will to embrace the uncertainty and anxiety of disruption is required. Thus it is important to note that wining and winging have the seeds – the opportunity – for reflection within them but a resolute will is needed to turn such attunements into reflective opportunities.

In conclusion of this section it can be said that for Heidegger the conditions under which reflection in practice occur is when a manager’s practice becomes explicit through a critical incident or disruption, that the manager is willing to embrace the anxiety or uncertainty of the disruption, that embracing the anxiety is a moment of authentic individualization in which the manager rather than relying on the received wisdom of the “they,” or the crowd, has the humility and determination to question the common sense assumptions of the practices that have become explicit. Such questioning is for Heidegger the condition upon which to open up new possibilities for or within a management practice. The human being questions because it is in question.

III

I would now like to demonstrate the Heideggerian theory of reflective practice by looking at disruptions in the practices of two leader/managers. The first is the experience of Steve Waugh, ex captain of the Australian cricket team and the second is the ex CEO of Intel, Andrew Grove. Beginning with Steve Waugh, I would like to focus on two disruptions or critical incidents each of which lead to different responses. The first disruptive event was his election as captain of the Australian cricket team and the second was his performance as a captain where he felt that he was letting both himself and the team down. Both disruptions lead to making explicit the implicit dimensions of being a captain but the first culminated in an inauthentic response and the second opened up an individualizing and authentic way of being as captain.

When he became captain of the Australian cricket team, Waugh was overwhelmed by the honour of the position and in some ways felt unsure as to whether he was up to the task. The way that he dealt with the anxiety of not feeling up to dealing with the task was by
playing the role of being the captain. By his own admission, he tried to be like a number
of the previous captains of Australia, imitating their way of doing things by reading up
about them and trying to follow the “manual” on what it meant to be a captain.

In Heideggerian terms he was in an inauthentic mode of being, following the “crowd” of
previous captains, doing things in a particular way because “they” had done it in that
way. This is not say that he did not have a view of what it meant to be a captain but, at
this stage, it was not his view. He had not yet been, in Heideggerian terms
“individualized” as a captain. He became what he called a “prisoner” to other people’s
ideas of being a captain.

However, the more he tried to be like previous captains, the less refined his “situational
appreciation” was. He found that he lost his spontaneity; his intuition and sense of
himself as a captain. As one commentator puts it: “Waugh did what others before him
had done. He listened – to former players, captains and commentators. He took advice
from anyone who was willing to give it – and there were many. He collated it all in his
head and the result was, well, uninspiring. Ian Chappell recalls, Waugh captained the side
in a conservative fashion, and that is not the style best suited to Australian
cricketers.”(Stewart 2001:19)

The notion of inauthenticity is not a moral but a psychological category indicating a state
of being emotionally and existentially withdrawn from a situation in which a person is in
and thus not alive and present to the possibilities inherent in a situation. In a situation of
inauthenticity a person is either frozen in their role or frozen in a state of emotional
detachment but in both cases they have lost their capacity for situationally appropriate
responding. They have lost their “responding-ability.” They are not “there” in what they
are doing but are withdrawing. Steve Waugh describes the experience of feeling distant
from his own team and function as a captain: “I could see not only my strength as a
leader fading by my absence, but also a team that was losing focus and direction.”
(Border A 2000: 204) Presence of mind is vital to being a captain who needs to be able to
trust his judgment in situation.

The issue came to a head for Steve Waugh when on a tour of Sri Lanka he broke his nose
in a game. In the moment of disruption he became aware of the fact that he had been
playing the role of being a captain: “I was sitting in the hospital with my nose smashed
everywhere thinking ’Jeez, if I never play a Test again, I haven’t done what I wanted to
do as captain. I haven’t really got stuck in and led from the front the way I’d like to have
led. I’ve sort of been a prisoner to other people and other ideas rather than going for it
myself.” (Stewart 2001:20)

Putting this in Heidegger’s terms: breaking his nose was a disruption or critical incident
which transformed his mode of being aware of himself and his way of being a captain.
After breaking his nose, he became aware of himself as having played the role of being a
captain; of doing things because the “crowd” of past good Australian captains did it in
“this way.” Paradoxically, it can be said that whilst he was playing the role of being a
captain, he was not aware of himself as playing the role of being a captain. He was again
paradoxically; too busy playing the role to see that he was playing the role. It was only when through breaking his nose he was jolted out of his practice of playing the role that he came to see that he was playing the role. It was only when he came to see that he was playing a role that he became aware of the assumption that he held about being a captain, that is, that to be a captain meant to follow the way others had been a captain. And it was only when he came to see that he held such assumptions and that he was playing the role of being a captain that he could free himself for new possibilities; for the possibility of developing his own way of being as a captain. He became a different kind of captain; one who led from his own intuitive understanding. As he puts it: “I decided to go on my gut instincts, to believe in my ability and go with that. I wanted to be loyal to myself and follow my own instincts rather than someone else’s…” (Stewart 2001:21)

Waugh’s experience demonstrates that reflection is not only a rational activity but one which involves a person’s being as a whole. It is an experience that includes a mood. The fact of being “jolted” out of playing the role of being a captain is an experience which has a mood. Although Waugh does not explicitly name the mood, it can be conjectured that it was a mood of astonishment or shock. For when we are jolted out of existing patterns of doing things, this is usually accompanied by a sense of shock. From the Heideggerian perspective the mood of shock and Waugh’s becoming explicitly aware of his inauthentic way of being a captain are part and parcel of the same event. In the mood of shock he begins to see his faulty assumptions and ways of doing things. For Heidegger we question because we have an experience of being in question.

Furthermore Waugh’s attitude towards the mood of being jolted is one of authentic resolve. When he had given up trying to captain the Australian cricket team by the textbook, Waugh did not have at his disposal an objective concept or image of what it meant to be a captain. Indeed he did not have a well developed and detailed linguistic representation of what it meant to be a captain. Rather he had what he calls a sense of loyalty to his own instincts. I want to interpret this liberally and say that rather than firing on automatic instinct, he wanted to make his own choices. In Heideggerian terms, this meant that he was in the experience of being individualized, allowing his own way of doing things to emerge rather than following the crowd.

Although Heidegger does not say this explicitly, Soren Kierkegaard, a philosopher whom Heidegger acknowledges as his precursor, (1985) claims that resolve contains an element of a leap into the unknown; a leap which requires what Kierkegaard called faith. It would be incorrect to understand faith as being blind for Kierkegaard. Although it is not based on objective knowledge, it is grounded in an inward certainty in the face of objective uncertainty. Indeed this is a definition of faith that Kierkegaard borrowed from Hegel. (1980:157) This faith is quite clearly evidenced in the case of Steve Waugh. When he had given up trying to captain the Australian cricket team by the textbook, Waugh did not have at his disposal an objective concept or image of what it meant to be a captain. Indeed he did not have a well developed and detailed linguistic representation of what it meant to be a captain. He trusted his ability to make decisions – and he trusted himself in the context of objective uncertainty. He did not first know what he was going to do and
then do it. On the contrary, it was only as he chose and made decisions that his knowledge emerged.

In Kierkegaard’s terms, Waugh had faith in himself and through acting in terms of his faith he came to develop as a captain and he began to develop a concept of what it meant to be a captain. Here we see a central existential theme, that is, that both our identity and our concept of what we are doing develops in the context of action. It is not by pure thought that our thought – our philosophy of being a captain, a manager, a leader develops. It is in the context of our actions that our philosophy develops. We become who we are through the kinds of choices that we make: “In life, a man commits himself, draws his own portrait, and there is nothing but that portrait. … Man makes himself; he is not found ready-made; he makes himself by the choice of his morality … We define man only in relation to his commitments.” (1975:42)

The Heideggerian reading of Waugh can be generalized to management practice as a whole: when we are busy in our practices as managers we are absorbed in such a way that we do not catch sight of our practices themselves. An experience of disruption transforms our relationship to our practices in such a way that we take an existential or emotional step back from them and are able to catch sight of them. The moment of catching sight of our practices is an occasion for both an authentic and inauthentic response. Existential resolve is required to move into a reflective relationship to our practices. Reflective relating to our practices opens up the possibility of transforming our practices. The faith of commitment is required to explore “our” way of doing things.

The second example that I would like to use to bring out the features of a Heideggerian perspective on reflection is the experience of Andrew Grove whose disruption as manager of Intel lead him to develop an appreciation of the role of disruption in leading and managing an organization. He came to see crisis not only as dangerous but in fact as an opportunity for new possibilities.

Heidegger quotes Holderlin, the German mystical poet in his description of the way in which crisis contains opportunity within it: “There were the danger is apprehended as the danger so the saving power grows.” (1977:28) In the danger of destruction there are opportunities. For Heidegger the concept of “saving power” should not be interpreted in terms of a theological perspective of being saved by a deity. For Heidegger the word saved is linked to opening new possibilities in experiences of being stuck or of not knowing how to go forward in an activity or even way of life. Being saved refers to seeing opportunities or a future where historically a person experienced no hope.

Grove’s experience at Intel is developed in his book *Only The Paranoid Survive* (1998) and exemplifies the attunement of creating new possibilities in the experience of abandoned hope. Until it came under unexpected threat from competitors in Japan, Intel had dominated the microchip market. Its culture, its ways of doing things were not in question, were not even an explicit theme of thought but formed the background against which Intel surged ahead in the market place. It focused on developing progressively more efficient microchips rather than being preoccupied with its culture. In fact its initial
response to the threat from competitors from Japan was to refine its production methods, its research practices and financial controls. It had a “let’s go out and get them” approach to the threat.

However, as the competitors beat off each threat, Intel began to see that it could not compete with its competitors on their terms. Employees at all levels became more and more demoralized, began to loose the passion, focus and direction. As Grove and other employees became more and more demoralized, they began to turn inward; began to bicker amongst themselves and to question the Intel way of doing things.

It is important to emphasise, from a Heideggerian perspective that this questioning was not an abstract and decontextualised questioning of the culture but a questioning in the context of crisis and in the mood of being under threat. In the threat to Intel’s way of doing things, Intel’s way of doing things became an explicit theme of concern and focus of questioning. Again we note the paradoxical form in which questioning arises: when Intel’s existence was not under threat it did not focus on its own existence; only when it anticipated its own death, as Grove claims it did, did it make explicit and question its own way of doing things.

Employees at Intel had different responses to the questioning of Intel’s way of doing things. Some wanted to hold onto the culture of Intel while others were ready and willing to let go of the strategic focus of Intel and open up new possibilities. Grove was in the latter group. He came to see that unless Intel jettisoned the old and opened up the possibility of the new it would not survive. Given that his identity as a person was woven into the fabric of the Intel way of doing things, this was not an easy choice for him. It tormented him. But the more he came to accept that Intel could not continue in its habitual way of doing things, the more he came to see new possibilities for Intel. In fact the new opportunities that he came to see for Intel were already being developed within Intel but because Grove had been so focused on responding to the threat posed by competitors, he failed to see the range of potential that Intel had within itself. The more he let go of the old, the more he was able to focus on bringing a set of potentials that were on the margins of Intel into the centre of Intel’s strategic focus. And the more he came to situate marginal possibilities at the centre, the greater his strength, passion and focus grew, so much so that that he began to lead Intel through a change that he had not foreseen or anticipated:

In Heideggerian terms, Intel was on the road to being “saved,” for the more it opened new possibilities for itself, the more it began to redefine the market and to re-establish itself as a dominant player in the market. Furthermore, in Heideggerian terms, the two different responses to crisis described in the previous paragraph exemplify the inauthentic and the authentic mode of responding to disruption: those who wanted to hold onto Intel’s culture reflect an inauthentic response while those, like Grove who were willing to stand outside of the security and safety of the Intel way of doing things reflect an authentic response. In Heideggerian terms the latter were willing to be “individualized,” willing to move beyond the safety of “our way of doing things.” It is also important to emphasise that the issue with the inauthentic way of doing things is not a moral one but
in fact is pragmatic: for when a way of doing things is destroyed, it becomes situationally inappropriate to hold on to that way of doing things – much like a nationalist who holds onto a “past “golden age” way of doing things.

The crisis at Intel led Grove into a crisis about the role of crisis in organizing and managing. A view of management was needed that would allow for recognising that crisis is not just an aberration that needs to be ordered and eliminated but that it is an essential feature of the contingent reality of organizations. Furthermore he came to see that management is not just about ordering, controlling and eliminating crisis but that new opportunities for the organization are contained in crisis and thus that we need not a one dimensional scientific account of management but a reflective account of management practice. A philosophy of management which reflects this position is developed in his book *Only the Paranoid Survive* (1998) which was itself a response to the crisis at Intel. In this work he came to question the scientific and rational view of management and to develop a reflective approach to management. Through his reflection in crisis he came to see how limited scientific management practices are for dealing with and seeing the creative potential in crisis and as a result of his questioning in crisis he developed a view of management that was responsive to and proactive in the face of the potential in crisis. Crises contain opportunities and the practices of managers need to be reframed to enable them to work in productive ways with the opportunities presented in crisis.

In his new view of management, management was not just about containing or ordering chaos but more sophisticated: a manager must know when to contain chaos and when to see chaos as an opportunity for exploration and reinvention. As he puts it there is a time to allow chaos to reign and there is a time to reign chaos in. Managers need the contextual or situational appreciation to know how to respond to chaos. Reflective attunement is central to being able to discern how to respond to chaos. While at times we do need to control in crisis; at other times crisis becomes an opportunity to rethink our way of doing things. Our concept of management needs to contain both possibilities.

In Grove’s example, the Heideggerian process of reflective questioning can be seen in at least two forms: firstly, it is in the context of a crisis at Intel that Intel’s way of doing things become a theme of explicit questioning. Embracing the questioning in the context of crisis opens up the window of new possibilities for Intel. Secondly, in the crisis about the role of crisis in organizations, Grove comes to make explicit and question the traditional scientific and rational view of management and opens up the possibility for new views and practices of management.

From a Heideggerian perspective, Grove’s reflections on his way of dealing with crisis highlight the role of mood in developing a reflective attunement. It also makes clear a distinction between those kinds of moods that open up the possibility of reflection and those kinds of moods which are non reflective. It has already been stated that for Heidegger reflection is not just a cognitive state but occurs in certain kinds of moods. One of the mood groups that Heidegger identifies as central to reflection is that of anxiety. Heidegger makes a distinction between anxiety and fear. Fear is always
experienced in the context of a specific threatening object – a wild animal, the dentist’s chair or an exam. We can take action in the face of the threat – “fight or flight” are both forms of response to fear.

Anxiety, on the other hand, is an experience of fear without being able to immediately locate a threatening object. In anxiety we feel frightened but have nothing specific to focus or concentrate on. Neither fight nor fright is possible in anxiety. It is a paralyzing and perplexing experience. In a broad and summary form, anxiety is, from a Heideggerian and existential perspective a response to a sense of emptiness and meaninglessness in life. But – and the logic of this is crucial -- for Heidegger, as for other existentialists, the experience of meaninglessness is not itself a meaningless experience. On the contrary, it is occasion upon which philosophy becomes a meaningful activity. For it is in experiences of meaninglessness that we tend to pose the question of the meaning of existence. Again the paradoxical logic of Heidegger needs to be noted. When life is meaningful, we tend not to pose the question of the meaning of life – in fact, under such circumstances, the question of meaning is meaningless – an irritant that prevents us from getting on with the hustle and bustle of life’s activities. On the other hand, when we have an experience of the anxiety of meaninglessness, the question of the meaning of life can no longer be taken for granted. It becomes an explicit preoccupation and a meaningful question.

A clear example of the Heideggerian logic in practice is to be found in the autobiography of Leo Tolstoy. He describes how his experiences of meaninglessness took him away from his everyday pursuits of writing, farming and even looking after his children. It changed his life style and he became preoccupied with exploring the question of the meaning of life. As he says he searched in science, in philosophy, in the wisdom and religious traditions of his day for a way of framing and answering the question of the meaning of existence. And he acknowledges that were he not to have been overwhelmed by the experience of meaningless, he would not have even considered asking these questions, for he would have seen them as unpragmatic, boring and a waste of time. (Segal 1995)

Grove’s account of his experience at Intel allows us to identify both moods of fear and anxiety. Grove identified his sensitivity to his own moods as essential to his reflective practice as a manager. In particular he identified the role of worry as central to his practice as a manager. As he explains, it is not disengaged analysis of data that keeps him attuned to threats in his organizational environment but it is worry that keeps him attentive: “The things I tend to be paranoid about vary. I worry about products getting screwed up, and I worry about products getting introduced prematurely. I worry about factories not performing well, and I worry about having too many factories. I worry about hiring the right people, and I worry about morale slacking off…” (1998:3)

In this way the ability to worry in an appropriate way becomes a central attunement of a manager. This point is central to the existential philosophy of Kierkegaard: “Whoever has learned to be anxious in the right way has learned the ultimate.” (1980:155)
Already Grove has taken us beyond a disengaged rational approach to management. Management is not only about the analysis of data. It is underpinned by a mood or an attunement to the environment in which a manager is situated: “So, when your business gets into serious difficulties, in spite of the best attempts of business schools and management training courses to make you a rational analyzer of data, objective analysis will take second seat to personal and emotional reactions almost every time.” (1998:123)

Managers need to develop not only their rational abilities to analyse data but their emotional attunement to the context in which they are managing. Historically management education, as Grove notes, has been concerned with the former and not the latter.

The second type of worry Grove claims occur in what he comes to call an “inflection point.” An inflection point is, by his own admission, like a paradigm shift in which the very fundamentals of a way of doing business can no longer be taken for granted: “Strategic inflection points … are full-scale changes in the way business is conducted, so that simply adopting new technology or fighting the competition as you used to is insufficient. They build up forces so insidiously that you may have a hard time even putting a finger on what has changed, yet you know something has.” (1998:4)

In such an experience we cannot rely on the assumptions of our habitual way of seeing and doing things but we do not yet have a new way of doing things. It is the kind of experience a migrant has when leaving the safety and familiarity of their home culture while not yet having acquired the ways of doing things of the new home land. It is the anxiety of not having any bearings. The language in which Grove writes about the experience of being in between the breakdown of a habitual way of doing things and the not-yet of a new way of doing things is quite existential. He writes about being in the “valley of death” (1998:140) in which the very existence of the organization is under threat. He uses the metaphor of entering the desert to describe the experience of having no beliefs by which to anchor himself and he describes the experience as one of going through the unknown.

For Grove the kind of worry that he had whilst Intel was under threat from its Japanese competitors was of this second and not the first kind. While it started off looking like a threat that came only from the outside and that could be met on the basis of the strengths of Intel’s culture and practices, he and others at Intel soon realised that they were existentially paralysed in the face of the competition. They became demoralized and aimless or putting it in Heideggerian terms, they could no longer rely on their established framework of meaning. It was a kind of death experience for them. They entered an attunement of meaninglessness. But it was precisely in embracing the possibility of the death of Intel that Grove’s eyes were opened to new possibilities. Indeed, it was in the moment of being resigned to the fate that he might need to leave Intel that he began to think in a new way of Intel. Describing a dialogue between the chairman of Intel, Gordon More and himself he says:
I remember a time in the middle of 1985, after this aimless wandering had been going on for almost a year. I was in my office with Intel's chairman and CEO, Gordon Moore, and we were discussing our quandary. Our mood was downbeat. I looked out the window at the Ferris wheel of the Great America amusement park revolving in the distance, then I turned back to Gordon and I asked, "If we got kicked out and the board brought in a new CEO, what do you think he would do?" Gordon answered without hesitation, "He would get us out of memories." I stared at him, numb, then said, "why shouldn't you and I walk out the door, come back and do it ourselves?" (1998:89)

Plato in his Republic said that the wisdom of the warrior lay in his ability to discern different types of threats; some threats call for action; while others call for reflection. In existential terms managers need to be able to distinguish anxiety experiences from fear experiences. Fear leads to action. Anxiety opens up the opportunity to see new possibilities. But we need to be willing to withstand the anxiety of being outside of the crowd mentality of common sense in order to allow the new possibilities to open up. The question is: are management theorists and practitioners ready and willing to embrace the possibilities in the anxiety of contingency? Or is this discourse going to continue being seen as a marginal and meaningless discourse? If, as Joseph Schumpeter maintained the free market is characterized not by an enduring stability but patterns of creative destruction, it is crucial for managers to be willing to embrace more than science in management. There is a need for reflective management practices.

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