

Call for Papers

The Military unconscious of management and organisations: genealogies of power, secularisation and the return of the repressed

**Critical Management Studies beyond the Academy? 30th June – 2nd July
2027, Lancaster University**

Stream Type

Paper presentation stream with a closing roundtable. We propose 3 sessions of 90 minutes each, accommodating 9-12 papers, followed by a 60-minute open roundtable oriented toward research directions and practical implications. The stream is designed for in-person delivery with hybrid options for presenters unable to attend Lancaster.

Convenors (in alphabetical order)

Charles Barthold, Senior Lecturer, Open University, UK (critical management studies, organisation studies, critical theory; he/him)

Layla Branicki, Professor, Bath University, UK (resilience and responsible crisis management, grand challenges, high-risk work settings; she/her)

Guillaume Delalieux, Professeur des Universités en sciences de gestion, La Rochelle Université / EOLE Lab, France (critical management studies, CSR, business and society; he/him)

Diversity statement:

The organising team spans two national contexts (France, UK). It includes two male and one female organiser. Research experience ranges across critical management studies, organisation studies, CSR, resilience and responsible crisis management, grand challenges, high-risk work settings. All three organisers have extensive experience in collaborative and internationally co-authored research. Furthermore, we actively commit to soliciting papers from early-career researchers, scholars for whom English is not their native language, Global South scholars and practitioners.

Abstract

This stream is conceived as a contribution to the ICMS conference theme of "CMS beyond the Academy" in a specific and somewhat uncomfortable sense. The military unconscious of management is an academic problem in the sense that it needs to be deconstructed in academic knowledge production. Beyond academia, it is a problem for every practitioner who uses the vocabulary of strategy without knowing its genealogy, every HR professional who deploys engagement frameworks descended from military psychology, every sustainability officer who manages social contestation through stakeholder protocols whose counterinsurgency logics remain invisible. Making this visible is itself a form of critical practice.

Management has a military blind spot. This is the central point we invite this stream to explore, interrogate and extend. This point is not merely historical, as it has a major impact on management and organisations. The historical record is clear: most

disciplines of modern management — strategy, marketing, human resource management, accounting or logistics — did not emerge solely from the neutral evolution of administrative rationality, but were largely shaped by military practices (Alliez and Lazzarato, 2018). Specifically, the key disciplines of management emerged from, and were shaped by, the institutional, epistemological and material dimensions of organised violence (Costas and Grey, 2019). Yet, one of the key ways violence is organised, that is to say, in a military context in order to fight and win wars, is largely downplayed in management and organisation studies (Hanlon, 2026).

Hoskin and Macve's (1986, 1988) foundational genealogical work demonstrates how the modern accountability mechanisms underlying management science were born at West Point military academy, where the novel conjunction of written examination and numerical grading produced the "panoptic" system of human accountability that subsequently colonised American industrial management via the railroads and armouries. Marketing as we know it was prefigured by the wartime propaganda machine: the architecture of consent pioneered by Bernays and Lippmann in the Committee on Public Information during World War I systematically transformed the techniques of wartime psychological manipulation into the instruments of peacetime consumer management (Scriver, 2015). Logistics, the science of coordinating the movement of resources (Virilio, 1986), is military doctrine applied to supply chains (Fleming et al., 2023). Strategic management draws explicitly from Clausewitz and military campaign theory, as McKinlay et al. (2010) have shown in their analysis of how Foucauldian strategy was translated into the corporate domain (see also, Kornberger, 2013).

While this historical observation has been touched upon by critical management studies, it has not been extensively researched and conceptualised. In this regard, we have two main points to make. Firstly, any conceptualisation of the military-management nexus needs to conduct genealogies of how the military dimensions of management reconfigure power relations and the organising of violence (Barthold et al., 2024; Foucault, 1977). Secondly, conceptualisations of the military-management nexus need to account for the translation of military discourses and practices into management and organisations.

By analogy with Max Weber's (2002) concept of the secularisation of religious values into the rationalised institutions of modernity, we propose the hypothesis that management has undergone a parallel process through which military values, logics, and techniques have been progressively translated into ostensibly civilian and rational administrative practices – a process that has rendered their military origins invisible, naturalised and largely inaccessible to critical interrogation.

The contemporary conjuncture sharpens the theoretical urgency of this argument. The return of great power competition, the militarization of supply chains and digital infrastructures, the entanglement of corporate responsibility with national security ecosystems, and the explicit mobilisation of counterinsurgency doctrine in the governance of social movements and political contestation — all of these developments suggest that the military unconscious of management is being reactivated and

remobilised in forms that are simultaneously more visible and more prominent than at any point since the Cold War (Alliez and Lazzarato, 2018).

This stream therefore invites papers that engage with the military unconscious of management from any of the following directions:

- Genealogical investigations tracing the military origins of specific management disciplines or practices – strategy, marketing, HRM, accounting, logistics, supply chain management, quality management, project management – drawing on a range of qualitative approaches such as historical archives, discourse analysis, or theoretical genealogy in the tradition of Foucault, Nietzsche, and the critical historical turn in organization studies (Rowlinson, 2004; Pezet and McKinlay, 2017).
- Theoretical contributions developing or critiquing the concept of military secularisation and its relationships to cognate concepts – rationalisation, disciplinary power, governmentality, hegemony, necrocapitalism, organisational violence.
- Contemporary applications analysing how the military unconscious of management is being reactivated in current organisational practices – the weaponization of corporate social responsibility, the dual-use character of digital governance infrastructures, the counterinsurgency logics of stakeholder management, the militarisation of supply chain intelligence.
- Critical reflexive engagements interrogating what it means for management scholars to work with concepts, theories and methods that may themselves carry military genealogies – including strategic thinking, operational efficiency, impact measurement and knowledge management.
- Normative and emancipatory interventions asking what alternatives to military management might look like – convivial, democratic, care-based, or decolonial forms of organizing that refuse the military logics embedded in managerial rationality.

References:

- Alliez, E. and Lazzarato, M. (2018). *Wars and Capital*. Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e).
- Barthold, C., Branicki, L. & Delalieux, G. (2024). Who's afraid of the big bad wolf? How corporations maintain hegemony by using counterinsurgency tactics to undermine activism. *Organization Studies*, 45(10), 1467–1491.
- Costas, J., & Grey, C. (2019). Violence and organization studies. *Organization Studies*, 40(10), 1573-1586.
- Fleming, P., Godfrey, R., & Lilley, S. (2023). Conceptualizing business logistics as an 'apparatus of security' and its implications for management and organizational inquiry. *Human Relations*, 76(10), 1545-1566.
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. London: Allen Lane.

Hanlon, G. (2026). 'The military dream of society': The military-state, security and the recreation of organisational order. *Organization*, 33(3), 351-369.

Hoskin, K. & Macve, R. (1986). Accounting and the examination: A genealogy of disciplinary power. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, 11(2), 105-136.

Hoskin, K. & Macve, R. (1988). The genesis of accountability: The West Point connections. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, 13(1), 37-73.

Kornberger, M. (2013). Clausewitz: on strategy. *Business History*, 55(7), 1058-1073.

McKinlay, A., Carter, C., Pezet, E. & Clegg, S. (2010). Using Foucault to make strategy. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, 23(8), 1012-1031.

Pezet, E. & McKinlay, A. (2017). *Foucault and Managerial Governmentality*. Routledge.

Scriver, S. (2015). War propaganda. *International encyclopedia of the social & behavioral sciences*, 25(2), 395-400.

Rowlinson, Michael (2004). Historical perspectives in organization studies: Factual, narrative, and archaeo-genealogical. In Damian E. Hodgson & Chris Carter (Eds.), *Management knowledge and the new employee* (pp. 8-20). Burlington, VT: Ashgate.

Virilio, P. (1986). *Speed and Politics*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e).

Weber, M. (2002). *The Protestant ethic and the "spirit" of capitalism: And other writings*. London: Penguin.

Supporting Detail

We anticipate three sessions:

- Session 1: Genealogical foundations – historical and theoretical papers on the military origins of management disciplines
- Session 2: Contemporary reactivations – empirical and conceptual papers on how military logics resurface in current management practice
- Session 3: Alternatives and emancipations – normative, reflexive and practice-oriented papers

We request a standard venue with a projector to accommodate hybrid options. No additional costs are anticipated. We intend to issue a call for papers to attract maximum diversity of contributors.