

“Being the Best”: A Critical Discourse Analysis of a Series of BC Public Service Strategic
Human Resource Plans

By

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BSc, University of Victoria, 2007

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Abstract

In 2006, the BC Public Service published the first of a series of corporate human resource plans entitled “Being the Best”. One of the key goals of these plans is to improve employee engagement at the BC Public Service. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is used to uncover the ideas and assumptions that underlie the employee engagement construct at the BC Public Service as well as better understand the influence these beliefs have on power relationships within the organization. Because there is a paucity of critical literature specifically focused on employee engagement discourse, the critical discourse analysis considers the broader discourse of human resource management. The analysis reveals that values and assumptions associated with the discourse of New Public Management (NPM) are woven into and across the texts. Three themes emerge from the analysis: transformational change is necessary and there is only one ‘right’ way to solve the crisis; the public servant identity is reshaped around the entrepreneurial spirit; and the organizational culture is redefined to align with NPM values. The effect of this discourse is to maintain and intensify managerial control over front line employees.

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Chapter One: Introduction

I have been a full-time employee of the BC Public Service Agency since 2006. From the start of my employment with the agency, I have wondered about, and struggled with, the power relationships at play in the workplace. The BC Public Service is a government bureaucracy, founded on a hierarchical model, where authority (or official power) is formally assigned to employees based on their rank in the organization. Executives have the highest level and broadest purview of authority. They are the leaders of the organization and provide the so-called marching orders. Managers, following the direction provided by executives, lead their teams of front liners forward. They supervise their employees, evaluate their work, and assign the tasks. Front line workers have the lowest level and narrowest purview of authority in the hierarchy. Their responsibility extends to how they conduct their work. I am a front liner.

The British Columbia Public Service Agency, generally referred to as the BC Public Service, was formed in 2003 to provide human resources to the Province of British Columbia's public service. The agency oversees the management of approximately 27,000 public service employees who provide a broad array of services to British Columbians (BC Public Service Agency [BCPSA], 2012, p. 6). The Institute of Public Administration of Canada describes the role of public servants (2012, The Public Servant's Commitments):

As professionals, public servants play a vital role in society. They are committed to the highest degrees of integrity. They are committed to deliver the best administration possible. They are committed to fair and transparent governance, to delivering high quality services, to a stewardship of government funds that will maximize cost-effectiveness and for accountability. Public servants are committed to the improvement of the policy-making and service delivery abilities of the state.

Public servants are committed to reflecting on their roles and responsibilities. They are committed to test and measure their values, their ethics, and their actions as they serve the government and the public.

At around the time when I started working at the BC Public Service, a new initiative was launched, which focused on measuring and increasing employee engagement levels in the organization. The BC Public Service defined employee engagement as “a multi-dimensional concept comprised of how satisfied employees are with their job and their organization, and how committed they are to it” (BCPSA, 2008, p. 17). Employee engagement levels were measured using an annual work environment survey. These ratings provided a measure of employees’ understanding of their roles as public servants and how their work contributes to achieving government goals. This employee engagement initiative was accompanied by a comprehensive human resource plan entitled “Being the Best”. One of the key goals of this plan was to improve employee engagement at the BC Public Service.

I became interested in the employee engagement initiative at the BC Public Service because it seemed to shift the responsibility of engagement on employees, rather than on the organization, which had control over features of work that influence engagement (such as, workload, availability and consistency of managerial support, and strategic direction responsive to the realities of the work on the ground). Moreover, the motivations behind this initiative looked to be more about meeting corporate goals and less about caring for employees. The driving force appeared to come from somewhere at the top of the government hierarchy, a place far removed from the front lines, where a disconnected elite made corporate decisions affecting both the public that employees serve and the employees themselves.

Many organizations have embraced employee engagement as a business management strategy. According to a *2010 Best Employers in Canada* study conducted by Hewitt Associates, the 50 organizations that appeared in the study focused their efforts on employee engagement (Hewitt Associates, 2010). An Internet search of the term “employee engagement” turned up over four million hits. Common searches related to employment engagement include best practices, surveys, ideas, strategies, and models. Employee engagement has been a subject of study by consulting firms and popular business press for over two decades. A search of the phrase “employee engagement consulting” resulted in over 35,000 hits. The term “employee engagement”, coined by the Gallup Research Group, is linked to profitability, productivity, and employee retention (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999; Little & Little, 2006).

Much of the research on employee engagement focuses on finding more effective ways to increase employee commitment levels. Shuck and Wollard (2010) completed a review of academic literature on employee engagement and found eight “seminal works” on the topic (p. 95). These writings were considered important because the articles have been extensively cited, the authors were well known for their work on this topic, or the research was centred on the development of the concept. William A. Kahn (1990) provides the first conceptualization in the academic literature of employee engagement (as cited in Shuck & Wollard, 2010, p. 95). Kahn (1990) explored psychological conditions that lead to engagement at work. He described engagement as the degree to which employees “are psychologically present” as they play their particular role in the workplace (Kahn, 1990, p. 692). Additional influential works appeared in 2001 and later. All of these works concentrated on defining engagement and assessing its outcomes for employers. Little academic literature interrogated the concept of employee engagement (Saks, 2006; Little & Little, 2006; Shuck & Wollard, 2010).

To better understand the ideas and assumptions that underlie the employee engagement construct at the BC Public Service, I have chosen to explore this topic for my thesis research. I am interested in the beliefs embedded in the concept of employee engagement and with the influence these beliefs have on power relationships at work. For this reason, I have selected Critical Discourse Analysis as my research methodology. Critical Discourse Analysis, or CDA, is a useful approach to account for the relationship between discourse and power in a specific social context. Discourse here refers to written and spoken text, as well as a category of representation about an aspect of social life. For this thesis, “Being the Best” is the text of interest because it is an important human resource management change initiative at the BC Public Service. According to the second edition of “Being the Best”, it is the first ever BC Public Service corporate human resource plan (BCPSA, 2007, p. 5). Power in the context of this research relates not only to the authority assigned to the various levels of the organization, but also to the influence of dominant social paradigms on and within the public service, in particular the neo-liberal paradigm. Administrative power, defined by Kernaghan (1978) as the influence of public servants on policy formation and execution, is not included in this discussion about power.

Because there is a paucity of critical literature specifically focused on employee engagement discourse, the critical discourse analysis will consider the broader discourse of human resource management. Indeed, a search of academic papers in the field of critical management studies was the more productive. Literature on New Public Management (NPM), combined with an historical review of management ideas, will provide the theoretical foundation for this research. The goal of this study is to understand the links between management discourse deployed in “Being the Best” and the power relationships at the BC Public Service. In particular,

this thesis will explore the ways in which the BC Public Service human resource plans articulate the management discourse, so as to reshape the identity of BC public servant in order to intensify management control.

In *Chapter 2*, I present a literature review of management thought since the Industrial Revolution. Then, in *Chapter 3*, I describe the multidisciplinary methodology employed in this research. In *Chapter 4*, I review the interdiscursive analysis of “Being the Best”, and in *Chapter 5*, I advance an alternate approach to management and offer my perspectives as a public servant working for the BC Public Service.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This literature review provides context for human resource management discourse at the BC Public Service. It consists of the critical literature about organizational management as well as the evolution of organizational management ideas. I begin the review by tracing the origins of management, beginning with the Industrial Revolution in the United Kingdom. I organize this material around four time periods, corresponding roughly to four different perspectives: the classical perspective (19th to early 20th centuries); the humanistic perspective (1910 – 1940s); the management science perspective (1940s – 1970s); and the knowledge worker age (late 1970s). I conclude the chapter with a brief look at contemporary Canadian public administration scholarship.

The first perspective begins with the invention of steam power, which was the trigger for the Industrial Revolution. Steam power lowered production costs, which led to lower prices and the consequent expansion of markets. Increase in demand required new machines and additional labour, resulting in increased coordination and direction of effort. Management became the “fourth factor of production” after land, labour and capital (Wren, 1994, p. 38) and launched the classical perspective in management. The second management perspective emerges during the 1920s as a response to the alienating nature of factory work and dehumanizing approach to management of the previous period. The third management period begins with World War II, a period during which complex social problems were emerging. To address this complexity, scientists developed operations models and new analytical research approaches. The fourth and final management perspective in this historical review arises in the late 1970s and corresponds with the emergence of the neo-liberal view of the market. To better understand the evolution of

management ideas over these four periods, each management perspective is explored in greater detail in the following pages.

The Classical Perspective – Authority through the Gaze

During the 19th and early 20th centuries in the United Kingdom, following the start of the Industrial Revolution, factory owners had to manage new forms of labour concerns, particularly recruitment, training, and motivation. Previously, workers had been more independent and self-sufficient and were accustomed to individualizing their work. Factory labour now required discipline, punctuality, and standardization as well as submission to strict regimes of supervision. As their operations grew, factory owners began to pass on management responsibilities to workers demonstrating greater technical skills and discipline, or to family members who had a vested interest in the company (Wren, 1994, p. 45). By the 1830s, management functions were becoming more defined and the first management texts were published. These texts focused primarily on the technical and commercial aspects of running a company; however, some texts were more critical of the growth of the factory system. For example, Thomas Malthus wrote about the commodification of workers who were powerless to fight back; Robert Owen advocated for an industrial society founded on a communal model rather than the individualism of the market; and Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels called for workers to unite against their factory masters (Wren, 1994, pp. 50-66).

In the United States by the early 1800s, Adam Smith's ideas on economic liberalism were widely read by business and political leaders. The economic conditions in this country, as well as the development of the railroads and the telegraph, supported large enterprise such as the prosperous textile manufactures. Employers with superior technical skills were hired to oversee

the “on-site” work and formed an intermediate level of management. A new management model emerged during this period that was based on rules, standards, and procedures of factory production. It is typified by Waring See’s (1880) two management principles: “a place for everything and everything in its place [and] specific lines of duty for each man” (as cited in Wren, 1994, p. 89).

Rapid technological advances and growth of big business required a systematized approach to management. In response, Frederick Winslow Taylor (1856 – 1915) developed new organizational methods concerned with the economization of effort within the factory (Wren, 1994, p. 105). Taylor’s theory of scientific management, also known as *Taylorism*, was developed as a means to determine the most efficient method to organize manual labour. It was founded on four management principles: find the best way to do the job; get the best worker; codify the tasks; and relate pay to output (Ironside & Seifert, 2000, p. 10). Taylor’s scientific management was grounded in the notion of national efficiency (based on the laws of the market), which was an emerging concern at this time. This national efficiency discourse articulated together the idea of organizational effectiveness with the concept of industrial efficiency of the productive worker (Mir & Mir, 2005). Taylor’s work not only produced effective technological tools to increase operational efficiency, but also led to a shift in authority in the workplace. The technologization of work required a “new class” of worker, one who would exercise authority by measuring worker performance (Mir & Mir, 2005, p. 55). This type of authority had limitations, however. Although the scientific management approach was successful in increasing profits, the mechanistic and dehumanizing aspects of this system eventually led to resistance. Trade unions rebelled and workers defied this new form of authority by performing to a minimum standard

and requiring constant supervision, thereby undermining the concept of efficiency (Crainer, 2003; Nixon, 2003; Mir & Mir, 2005).

During this period of national efficiency, not all industrial scientists focused their work on the shop floor. Others concentrated their studies on the administrative functions of the factory. Henri Fayol (1841 – 1925), considered to be the founder of administrative management theory, focused on running the factory (Pryor & Taneja, 2010). Although a mining engineer, Fayol is better known for his writings on administration and management. In June 1900, he delivered a speech to his mineral industry colleagues. The following excerpt summarizes his thinking very succinctly.

While we are trying to master matter ... we must try to master ourselves, to discover and apply the laws which will make the organization and running of administrative machinery as perfect as possible. Why should we not share our observations, experiences, and thoughts for the common good? (as cited in Wren, Bedeian, & Breeze, 2002, p. 907)

Fayol believed that the success of an organization was dependent on effective management. Like other classical management theorists, his work was task-oriented and less concerned with employee morale (Pryor & Taneja, 2010; Wren et al., 2002). His fourteen management principles exemplified this approach to management. These included division of work, esprit de corps, equity, centralization, scalar chain, discipline, and unity of command (Pryor & Taneja, 2010, p. 489). Fayol also identified five functions of management—planning, organising, commanding, coordinating, and controlling—and important tools to guide management activities. These tools remain in use today and include surveys, business plans,

operations reports, minutes of meetings, and organizational charts (Pryor & Taneja, 2010, p. 493).

Development in management ideas during this period was not limited to industry. Theorists also took an interest in the management of large public institutions. Max Weber (1864 – 1920), a German academic and sociologist, was interested in what motivates employees to submit to authority. He identified three types of authority: traditional, derived from customs and traditions; charismatic, earned through trust and respect; and rational-legal, or bureaucratic, organized by rules and procedures (Wren, 1994, p. 195). Weber identified six characteristics of a bureaucracy: (1) division of labour; (2) management by rules; (3) hierarchy of authority; (4) employee selection based on qualifications; (5) managers as salaried officials; and (6) written documents (Wren, 1994, p. 195). Weber's work into state institutions led to the popularization of the term "bureaucracy". Although he supported leadership by rationality and encouraged the orderly arrangements of personnel and execution of activities, he also noted that the bureaucracy could be inflexible and lead to low creativity (Wren, 1994, pp. 195-197).

Taylor, Fayol, and Weber contributed significantly to the classical perspective on management; they valued efficiency and applied a scientific and rational lens to organizations. Although they each looked at different aspects of enterprises, their theories were founded on the same notion of authority through measurement (Wren, 1994). In this codified approach to the management of work, the supervisor's role is to evaluate and maximize the productivity of each worker. This requires continuous observation and measurement. Through the gaze of the supervisor, the worker ceases to be a person and becomes but a cog in the wheel of the factory. However, by the 1920s, theories that focused on the social person began to emerge (Wren, 1994,

p. 235). This was the start of the humanistic perspective on management. Psychology and anthropology were at the forefront of this shift in management perspective.

The Humanistic Perspective – Authority through the Embrace

The humanistic perspective on management (1920s – 1950s) rests on the belief that organizations benefit from including a human dimension to management practices (Nixon, 2003, p. 6). The development of this perspective coincided with an economic shift—from laissez-faire capitalism to the Keynesian welfare model (Mir & Mir, 2005, p. 60). This change resulted in “a new set of managerial practices and discourses that were aimed at balancing the authoritarian structure of the organization against the welfare-oriented goals of society” (Mir & Mir, 2005, p. 60). Theories of employee empowerment emerged at this time and called for a shift in authority, away from the supervisory “gaze” toward a more cooperative “embrace” (Mir & Mir, 2005, p. 61). By providing workers with greater decision-making power and responsibility, humanist management theorists argued that employees would be more willing to cooperate with managers, thereby leading to more efficient organizations. Two schools of thought dominate this period—the human relations school of management, pioneered by Elton Mayo, and the behavioural sciences approach to management, influenced by theorists such as Chester Barnard, Douglas McGregor, and Mary Parker Follett.

George Elton Mayo (1880 – 1948) was a sociologist and professor of industrial research at Harvard. He is well-known for his research at Western Electric’s Hawthorne factory in Chicago during the 1920s and 1930s. The purpose of the research was to better understand the impacts of physical conditions on productivity. Mayo and his colleagues noted that every time a change was made on the shop floor (such as a change in lighting) productivity went up regardless of the change. They concluded that it was not the physical change that affected the productivity

of workers in the study, but rather the additional attention that those workers received during the research. Mayo noted a clear link between supervision, morale, and productivity. He also determined that employee performance is influenced not only by the quality of supervision, but also by group dynamics (Reiger, 1995, p. 58). He wrote:

The working group as a whole actually determined the output of individual workers by reference to a standard that represented the group conception (rather than management's) of a fair day's work. This standard was rarely, if ever, in accord with the standards of the efficiency engineers. (Hindle, 2008, p. 100)

Mayo proposed that treating employees with respect and consideration and including them in the decision-making process made them more willing to work hard for their employer. The area of human relations is considered to be Mayo's creation (Lucas, n.d., para. 6).

Chester Irving Barnard (1886 – 1961) was an academic as well as a successful business executive—he was president of the New Jersey Bell Telephone Company and the Rockefeller Foundation. His ideas were important in bridging Taylor's scientific management theory with Mayo's human relations philosophy (Rasmussen, 2003). Barnard identified three principles critical to a successful organization, namely cooperation, common purpose, and communication (Rasmussen, 2003, p. 521). He developed a cooperation formula, where the willingness of an employee to cooperate with management is “equal to the inducements to co-operate in conjunction with the sacrifices involved versus the net satisfactions available through the realizable alternatives” (McMahon & Carr, 1999, p. 235). Common purpose was necessary to achieve cooperation as it served as a guide for cooperative efforts. To achieve a common purpose, Barnard recognized that individuals must be willing to give up their own personal motives in favour of those of the organization. Communication, the third of Barnard's principles,

was critical to achieving a common purpose. Without effective communication, cooperation and common purpose could not be achieved (McMahon & Carr, 1999, p. 235).

Douglas McGregor (1887 – 1957), management scholar at MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) Sloan School of Management, introduced Theory X and Theory Y in his book, *The Human Side of Enterprise*. McGregor's theories described two contrasting sets of conceptions managers hold about workers. Theory X said that managers assume workers dislike and attempt to avoid work, lack ambition, and require authority and control (Carson, 2005, p. 450). This management style predominated during the scientific management period. Theory Y, on the other hand, stated that managers believe workers strive for fulfillment at work, exercise self-control, seek responsibility, and prosper in an environment where their creativity is nurtured (Carson, 2005, p. 450; Jacobs, 2004, p. 293). Theory Y challenged managers “to innovate, to discover new ways of organising and directing human effort” (Hindle, 2008, p. 187). McGregor favoured Theory Y, which is considered to be “one of the hallmark relationship management principles of the late 20th century” (Carson, 2005, pp. 450-451).

Another important theorist from the 1920s, whose work is compatible with McGregor's Theory Y, was Mary Parker Follett (1868 – 1933). Follett was a social philosopher as well as a social worker. Her “social person platform” had three “planks” (Carson, 2005, p. 454). The first was a common sense of purpose between a manager and his employees; the second called for “co-action” rather than “coercion”; and the third made a case for coordination, as this was considered necessary to achieve common goals (Carson, 2005, p. 454). Follett promoted participatory decision-making and called for a decentralized-power base in the workplace. Although many managers were attracted to her work, she encountered resistance from those who thought her ideas were too idealistic and lacked empirical evidence (Reiger, 1995).

Contemporary management theorists such as Peter Drucker and Rosabeth Moth Canter consider Follett to be a prophet of management and the mother of conflict resolution. Follett argued that the best way to resolve conflict was to find “an integrated solution that would meet the interests of all parties” (Graham, 1985, p. 5). A review of contemporary academic research reveals renewed interest in her work (Fry & Thomas, 1996, p. 13; Graham, 1985, 2003).

Mayo, Barnard, McGregor, and Follett were early advocates of a more humanistic perspective on management that emphasized the importance of understanding human behaviour and group dynamics in the workplace. Through this new understanding, managers were able to take advantage of individuals’ willingness to cooperate as well as the tendency of groups to self-regulate, thereby shifting management away from more authoritarian forms of authority. Managers achieved control by embracing workers as a part of a more inclusive organization and instilling a sense of common purpose across the organization. Through psychology and sociology, management approaches were growing much more sophisticated. However, increasingly complex social issues led to a third shift in management, toward greater use of quantitative techniques. From the 1940s to the 1970s, mathematics, engineering, and statistics played a much greater role in management.

The Management Science Perspective – Rational Decision Making

During World War II, mathematicians, physicists, and statisticians developed scientific research tools to help resolve complex military problems. This new field of scientific research also applied to organizational management. This operational view of organizations marked the beginning of a new perspective in management. It focused on understanding organizational processes, mapping information flows, and quantifying inputs and outputs, in order to enable

organizations to make rational management decisions. The terms “Operations Research” and “Management Science” are common labels to describe this field of study.

Management Science is based in science and technology and borrows from many disciplines such as mathematics, statistics, economics, and engineering. It adopts a Western view of the organization, which Kujiro Nonaka (1991) defines in this way:

Deeply ingrained in the traditions of Western management, from Frederick Taylor to Herbert Simon, is a view of the organization as a machine for ‘information processing.’ According to this view, the only useful knowledge is formal and systematic – hard (read: quantifiable) data, codified procedures, universal principles. (para. 3)

Herbert A. Simon (1916 – 2001) contributed significantly to Management Science. He is considered to be “the ‘prophet’ of bounded rationality and a founding father of artificial intelligence and cognitive science” (Assad, 2004, p. 479). Bounded rationality states that humans lack the cognitive capacity, as well as the necessary time and information, to solve complex problems. Simon theorized that, when facing difficult problems, decision makers simplify their options by using their experiential knowledge, an approach called heuristics. In the early 1950s, Simon and his colleague, Alan Newell, investigated the use of computers to solve complex issues. They simulated human cognition and heuristic problem solving, thereby creating the first artificial intelligence (Assad, 2004, p. 482).

Operations Research remains an important area of study. Simon Fraser University (2011) currently offers an Industrial Mathematics Bachelor of Science that focuses on Operations Research, which is defined as: “the discipline of applying advanced analytical methods to help make better decisions and is sometimes referred to as Management Science or simply as

Optimization” (para. 1). W.J. Hopps (2008), editor-in-chief of the journal *Management Science*, notes changes in the field. Since the 1990s, researchers have shifted their focus away from tactical issues toward broader strategic management concerns. They also employ a larger range of research methods, incorporate more realistic human behaviour into their models, and increasingly conduct empirical research.

Management Science in many ways resembles its predecessor, Taylorism. Both management approaches are founded on hard science and rationality, have as one of their key goals the management of productivity, and view workers as figures to be entered into analytical, mathematical, and statistical models of organizations. However, the management context has changed significantly since Taylor’s time. The notion of work and the worker has evolved in response to a broad shift in production and employment—the factory worker has made way for the knowledge worker. Also, following the economic recession of the late 1970s-early 1980s, the neo-liberal model has replaced, in a number of important respects, the Keynesian welfare state model of social policy and administration. This change has led to, and is supported by, managerial reforms in the public sector. Whereas traditional public administration emphasizes process, rules and stability, New Managerialism advocates the application of private-sector management practices in the public sector. In the following section, I present the fourth management perspective – the knowledge worker age – and discuss the emergence of a new managerial philosophy that serves to intensify management control under the guise of freedom from bureaucratic constraints.

The Knowledge Worker Age – A Shift in Authority

In 2005, Steven Covey, author of the popular book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, called the current management era “the knowledge-worker age” (as quoted in Hindle,

2008, p. 232). Over forty years ago, the term “knowledge worker” was coined by management guru Peter Drucker (1909 – 2005) (Hindle, 2008, p. 235). At this time, knowledge workers represented a new class of workers, distinct from manual workers. These workers were valued for the specialized knowledge they brought to their work. As the industrial age made way for the information age, the distinction between the two classes became blurred. Hammer (in Ascente, 2010) defines today’s knowledge worker as “someone who knows more about his or her job than anyone else in the organization” (p. 280). Based on this definition, all workers could be considered knowledge workers.

In an information age, knowledge is a most valued resource for organizations; therefore, possessing knowledge gives workers some level of autonomy in the workplace. Drucker (1999) explains: “Knowledge workers ... *own* the means of production” (p. 87, original emphasis). This makes knowledge workers themselves an asset to the organization. The role of managers is to preserve these assets as well as maximize their value. According to Drucker (1999), the challenge for organizations is to increase the productivity of the knowledge worker. He identifies six factors that can influence productivity: (1) determine the task; (2) place responsibility of productivity on the worker himself; (3) make continuous innovation as well as (4) continuous learning and teaching a responsibility of the worker; (5) value quality as much as quantity; and (6) treat employees as assets rather than costs (Drucker, 1999, pp. 83-84).

Nonaka (1991), who studied and taught at the University of California at Berkeley, introduced Eastern ideas about knowledge into Western-style management. In his 1991 paper, *The Knowledge-Creating Company*, he introduced a different understanding of knowledge for management studies. In a typical Western organization, creating new knowledge generally consisted of processing data, whereas in an Eastern organization, new knowledge commonly

emerged from the insights and intuitions of individual employees. Accessing this tacit knowledge required committed employees. In such an organization, Nonaka (1991) said, “everyone is a knowledge worker – that is to say, an entrepreneur” (para. 9).

Costea, Crump, and Amiridis (2007) are critical of the new logic that supports contemporary management approaches. They suggest that new managerial practices function to reconstruct the idea of work “as a series of acts of self-understanding, self-examination and ‘self-work’, and through which the ‘self qua self’ is constituted as the central object of management technologies” (Costea, Crump, & Amiridis, 2007, abstract). According to Costea et al. (2007), managerialism represents a nexus where the meaning of work and ‘self’ are drawn in and reconfigured and where the contradictions of work are erased. Work is redrawn as a sphere where all aspects of the self belong. The site of control is displaced from external authority to the inner attributes of the subject. Under this form of managerialism, management follows a new logic: “to govern mainly through subjectivity” (Costea et al., 2007, p. 246). This set of contemporary managerial strategies is relevant to my research because it is based on a schema of power that is concealed from view by a veil of autonomy and self-determination. Yet, as with previous management strategies, the goal of managerialism is to manage the productivity of the worker.

In the following subsections, I go into detail about three aspects of the management of the knowledge worker addressed in critical academic literature. First, I examine Costea et al.’s (2007) critical writing on New Managerialism, a management approach that emerged in the late 1970s that engages with the values of neo-liberalism. Then, I consider the emergence of the so-called post-bureaucratic organization and two associated dominant discourses identified by Maravelias (2003). Finally, I look at strategic change management initiatives in public sector

organizations as presented by Diefenbach (2007). I conclude this literature review with a brief discussion of managerialism in the Canadian context.

New Managerialism.

New Managerialism is a trend that emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s, first in England and the United States and later on in Canada (Costea et al., 2007; Diefenbach, 2009; Savoir, 2008; Weeden, 2010). In the context of the public service, New Managerialism is also referred to as New Public Management (NPM). NPM represents a public service ideology associated with neo-liberalism, “the project of economic and social transformation under the sign of the free market” (Connell, Fawcett, & Meagher, 2009, p. 331). Proponents of NPM argue that this approach to management is necessary for public sector organizations in order to adapt to, and keep pace with, a changing global economic landscape (Diefenbach, 2009, para. 6). It operates by transforming the identity of public organizations into a more business-like identity. NPM espouses a corporate model of management, where public institutions are expected to “*make themselves accountable* in terms of competition” using performance management technologies of accountability and appraisal (Connell et al., 2010, p. 334, original emphasis). Hood (1991) suggests that NPM is a “marriage” of new institutional economic doctrines and scientific management principles (p. 6). Concepts associated with institutional economics include contestability, user choice, and transparency. Ideas connected with scientific management include professional management, portable expertise, appropriate culture, and discretionary power (Hood, 1991, pp. 5-6).

Costea et al. (2007) traced the evolution of new managerial ideology from its authoritarian roots of the industrial era, which was dominated by the Protestant Ethic, to the 1980s “idea that organizational culture was vital to competitive advantage” (p. 248).

The aim of managing culture was to recover the managerial prerogative and to marshal organizations around a collective identity underpinned, however, by the attributes of an autonomous, ‘empowered’ working subject with a ‘reengineered’ mentality of organizational membership. (Costea et al., 2007, p. 248)

The problem of managing productivity was addressed by injecting workplace culture with the ideals of commitment and excellence. In the 1990s, the concepts of knowledge and continuous learning were included in the “vocabulary of managerial governance” (Costea et al., 2007, p. 250). Organizations portrayed themselves as open to new ideas and change—the opposite of Taylor’s codified approach to management. In exchange, workers were expected to engage in continuous learning and innovative thinking. In the 2000s, “*ludic* technologies” were added to the set of management ideals (Costea et al., 2007, p. 251, original emphasis). Work was now depicted as playful and spontaneous—a counterpart to the Protestant Ethic. Together, these new managerial ideals called workers to engage in a process of self-actualization through work. Costea et al. (2007) proposed that one of the key tools employed by managers to engage workers is the performance appraisal, a kind of therapeutic exercise, where “traditional authoritarian vocabularies of control ... fade into the background” (p. 254).

The performance appraisal takes the form of what Costea et al. (2007) called the “therapeutic habitus” (p. 254). ‘Habitus’ in this context takes on Thomas Aquinas’ sense of the term: “the way in which human nature acquires the perfection of the ‘soul’ by balancing the relationships between ‘passions’ ... and ‘reason’ in the name of making every human act ‘virtuous’” (p. 254). ‘Therapeutic’ refers to “an act of doing service to the god” through self-examination and confession (Costea et al., 2007, p. 254). The confessional becomes the manager’s office, where the employee, through self-examination, strives for a better and more

fulfilled self. Through the ‘therapeutic habitus’, the organization shifts from being a highly structured hierarchy to a “communal symbolic system” with no fixed boundaries (Costea et al., 2007, p. 255). The individual is positioned as an autonomous subject within a collective. The therapeutic element is essential as it links the success of the organization with the personal success of each employee.

During the performance appraisal, the manager assesses the employee’s commitment to excellence and continuous development. The performance appraisal as confessional is concerned with the *self qua self*. Costea et al. (2007) argued that managerialism has appropriated modern ideas of the self. Before modernity, a person’s sense of self was established through its relationship with the cosmos and the divine order. Today, the self has become a single point of reference in a boundless universe. Work, through the performance appraisal, becomes a source of meaning and value for the self. Through the performance appraisal, the employee is liberated from the shackles of authoritarian management. The individual is now free to explore his or her endless potential through self-examination and expression. Costea et al. (2007) referred to this endless journey of discovery as a “derecognition of finitude” (p. 259). Endless potential means there is no end point and the self is forever an insufficiently utilized resource waiting to be discovered.

Costea et al.’s (2007) theory of infinite human resourcefulness is useful for this thesis because it agrees with managerial initiatives that rely on the performance appraisal as a means to encourage employees and their managers to look beyond the traditional boundaries of work to explore their sense of self. During the performance appraisal, employees are urged to tap into their infinite potential for the benefit of the workplace as well as their own personal development (that is, self-work). This ‘therapeutic’ exercise not only accesses more of the employees’

personal resources, but also shifts the responsibility for the success of the organization onto the employees.

Extended Bureaucracy or Post-Bureaucracy?

Maravelias (2003), in his paper “Post-Bureaucracy – Control through Professional Freedom”, observes that “an increasing number of works have pointed to the demise of the bureaucratic organization and the emergence of a new post-bureaucratic form of organization, referred to as the entrepreneurial or network-shaped organization” (p. 547). Maravelias (2003) identifies two dominant discourses related to post-bureaucracies.

The first, called managerial discourse, views the break from bureaucracy as a positive move. A central tenet is the idea that bureaucracies are oppressive, impersonal, and stale as well as unable to cope with our changing economy and cultures (Maravelias, 2003, p. 549). Post-bureaucracies, in contrast, are less rigid and seen to have the necessary flexibility to adapt to a changing world. Key features of post-bureaucracies include a focus on results, cooperation, continuous improvement and risk taking, cost recovery of programs, and service delivery competition with the private sector (Kernaghan, 1994, pp. 91-92). The organic, flat, and communitarian structure of post-bureaucracies empower employees to “activate the energy, the cultural glue and competence inherent in communities, and to align these ‘resources’ with the goals and visions of the organization” (Maravelias, 2003, pp. 549-550).

The second discourse is critical of the post-bureaucracy and argues that “under a more liberal façade post-bureaucracy involves sophisticated forms of managerial domination” (Maravelias, 2003, p. 550). This post-bureaucratic organization employs “disciplinary technologies of control” that target employees’ identities (Maravelias, 2003, p. 547). Culture is an important element of the post-bureaucratic organization. Employees who fail to portray the

values and expected behaviours of the organization lose the trust assigned to them. The critical discourse on post-bureaucracy is founded on labour process theory, which views organizations as resulting from a “structural antagonism between sellers of labor who seek secure and meaningful employment, and owners and managers who seek accumulation of capital” (Maravelias, 2003, p. 550).

Maravelias (2003) maintains that both discourses consider the post-bureaucratic organization to be distinct from the traditional bureaucracy. However, he argues that the post-bureaucracy is actually an expansion of the bureaucratic organization, rather than a break from it. He offers the concept of non-inclusiveness to argue his case. Maravelias (2003) explains that during pre-modern times, work, home, and social position were relatively undifferentiated. Bureaucracies separated paid work from home and public life. This allowed paid work to be standardized. Work roles could be “designed, modified, adapted, abandoned, or repositioned in response to the emerging technical, social, and economic changes an organization faces” (Maravelias, 2003, p. 552). Being an effective employee required the ability to adapt one’s actions to meet the requirements of the role. Although the post-bureaucracy seems to include the whole of the individual by encouraging a sense of belonging and purpose, Maravelias (2003) argues that an organization has very little reason “to internalize family or community issues of its employees” (p. 554). He maintains that the organization does, however, have a vested interest in internalizing those elements that are to its benefit—it involves employees “in non-inclusive terms” (Maravelias, 2003, p. 554).

Maravelias (2003) conducted a case study of a company that he argues characterized the post-bureaucratic organization: it pushes for product and service innovation; its work is apportioned to “multi-skilled” teams; and it advocates for a “high trust culture” (Maravelias,

2003, p. 555). The company affords freedom to its employees by leaving roles and responsibilities undefined. Maravelias (2003) found that this had the effect of intensifying rather than loosening control. Uncertainty resulting from undefined roles leads to lack of trust between employees; therefore, they feel compelled to prove themselves as being trustworthy. They do so by carefully bringing in those elements of their private lives that sustain their professional identities. Maravelias (2003) quotes an employee (p. 557) who said:

When you look around this place, it is easy to think that people are very informal.

I don't think that would be a correct interpretation. On the contrary I think most people that work here are best described as highly disciplined and professional.

What tends to create this informal image is the fact that acting professionally in this environment is to do your job in a manner that makes it seem natural, just like it was, in fact, not a job.

Maravelias (2003) notes that, by embracing rather than resisting individuals' freedom, organizations seemed to have moved beyond the 'shackles' of bureaucracy; at the same time, they have gained control by using individuals' freedom as a resource. In the case study, lack of certainty drove individuals to work harder and monitor each other's behaviours more intensely. Those who gained trust (namely, the 'trustees' in the company) exhibited "a distinct personal style" (Maravelias, 2003, p. 557). Employees used their individuality as a resource, thereby blurring the line between paid work and private life. As argued in Costea et al.'s (2007) work, the self became the focus of management. This new management logic is particularly powerful, since it makes it difficult for individuals to resist something that is both undefined and originates from within.

I use Maravelias' (2003) work in this thesis to highlight inconsistencies in the discourse of managerialism. At first look, these new management approaches appear to break significantly from the traditional bureaucracy of command and control. However, as Maravelias (2003) argues, these more manipulative management technologies actually extend the reach of management into the realm of the self. Using the notion of freedom as a cover, organizations are intensifying control by making employees responsible for "outlining the content of individuals' roles" (Maravelias, 2003, p. 554). Although BC Public Service administrators are engaging with post-bureaucratic concepts, they remain very much rooted in the bureaucratic model, as they continue to follow a clear hierarchy of roles and responsibilities. NPM strategies represent an extension and intensification of bureaucratic authority, rather than a break from it.

Strategic Change in Public Sector Organizations.

Diefenbach (2007) explores the increasing occurrence of change management initiatives in public sector organizations. In particular, he is interested in the effectiveness of a strategic change initiative in a large university undergoing "deep-cutting organisational changes" (Diefenbach, 2007, p. 127). He notes that this organizational change management initiative is consistent with a neo-liberal view of organizations and entails "the negotiation or the renegotiation of shared meaning about what is to be valued, believed in and aimed for" (Spencer-Matthews, as cited in Diefenbach, 2007, p. 127). A key strategy for introducing organizational change is based on the "TINA-principle" – "There is no alternative!" (Diefenbach, 2007, p. 129). This strategy originated with Margaret Thatcher. It consists of constructing a social reality to which there is only one possible solution. Typically, official reasons for change are "to increase efficiency and reduce costs, to increase profits and growth, to become more business-like and to

secure the survival of the organization” (Diefenbach, 2007, p. 135). However, Diefenbach (2007) argues that strategic change initiatives are more about gaining and retaining power and control of organizational resources than achieving cost efficiencies.

How are power and control achieved? First, the leaders of the change initiative emphasize the need, and assert the authority, to respond to an external threat such as a challenging business environment. Then, they provide guidance on how to undertake the changes. Guidance is a key element to overcome resistance. It educates individuals about the correct way to embrace the change. It targets the culture of the organization, its “attitude, behaviour, ways of thinking, ways decision are made” (Diefenbach, 2007, p. 133). Those who resist change serve as justification for the change management initiative. Willmott (1997) explains: “Rubbishing the workforce as short-sighted and self-interested enables managers to secure and sustain their position and prerogative as the sole trustees and defenders of ‘business objectives’ who, according to their self-serving rhetoric, are not ‘self-interested’” (as cited in Diefenbach, 2007, p. 133). Managers, who are responsible for implementing organizational changes, largely make decisions based on their own personal interests, such as career growth, income, etc. Diefenbach (2007) notes: “By pursuing their personal interests they also pursue group interests. NPM change initiative is an odd combination of managerialistic ideology, personal and group interests” (p. 136).

New Public Management in Canada

Since the 1980s, Canadian public administration has been reconceptualised in terms of NPM values. Organizations and individuals are assessed on the basis of performance targets and competition and privatization are regarded as virtues (Borins, 1995). Senior government officials seek advice from clients and customers, employ business-derived terms, focus on tasks rather

than process, and “[m]any have publicly called for the replacement of the dead hand of bureaucracy with what they regard as an invigorating management concept inspired by the private sector” (Savoie, 2004, p. 14).

Opinions are mixed on the value of NPM to Canadian public administration (Kernaghan, 1995, p. 481). Sanford Borins (1995) argues that NPM has had a positive impact on the public service. He maintains that this management model is necessary to address the “inescapable forces” of a changing economic and social context (Borins, 1995, p. 123). These forces include global economic competition, the rapid growth of information technology, people’s increasing demands for higher quality service, and the desire of knowledge workers to find “work in either the public or private sectors that provides opportunities for personal growth and fulfillment, rather than just a pay cheque” (Borins, 1995, p. 123).

Donald J. Savoie (1995) is critical of NPM’s philosophy, which he argues is “rooted in the conviction that private sector management is superior to public administration” (Savoie, 1995, p. 113). He views this notion as faulty given that the private sector and government play very different roles—“the two sectors are fundamentally alike in all unimportant ways” (Savoie, 1995, p. 114). He makes a case that if the bureaucracy is broken, it is not public servants who are to blame, but politicians, parliamentarians, and Canadians. He says: “[P]ublic servants became public servants because they wanted to serve their country. If they wanted to become entrepreneurs, they would have joined the private sector or started their own businesses” (Savoie, 1995, p. 118). Savoie (2004) argues that the “well-articulated space[s]” of traditional government, such as departmental units, job descriptions, etc., are becoming less well defined (p. 4). He is concerned about the impact of this trend on the concept of accountability. He proposes

the notion of co-accountability given that policy and program decisions are often “the product of many hands” (Savoie, 2004, p. 20).

Kenneth Kernaghan (1995) takes a middle ground stance regarding the benefits of NPM as a management paradigm for Canadian public administration. He proposes that there should be less emphasis on the market model of NPM and suggests that other models of public service reform, such as Robert Denhardt’s participative model, can be more constructive. The participative model calls for reforms in the areas of empowerment, shared leadership, and service to the public. Kernaghan (1995) argues that improvements in these areas can be made without the adoption of the full suite of NPM reforms (such as privatization and deregulation). He also suggests that accountability and innovation are not incompatible and advocates for the sharing of knowledge between the public and private sectors (Kernaghan, 1995, p. 482). Much of Kernaghan’s work focuses on values and ethics (1976, 1994, 1995, 2000, and 2003). In “A Special Calling: Values, Ethics, and Professional Public Service”, Kernaghan (2003) talks about the need to balance the democratic values of accountability and transparency with the professional value of public service. Public interest is “the touchstone of motivation for public servants” (Deputy Ministers Task Force, in Kernaghan, 2003, p. 33).

The Canadian public sector, like those of other western nations, has adopted the NPM management model. Three prominent Canadian academics disagree on the impacts of this shift: Borins (1995) views this change as a positive move; Savoie (2004) disapproves of the adoption of NPM ideology; and Kernaghan (1995) considers change as necessary, but suggests there are alternatives to the market model of management. He points to democratic and professional values and ethics as a means to ensure the public interest is achieved. Kernaghan’s ideas

regarding ethics and values help inform my own thoughts, which I explore in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

Summary

Having provided a context for understanding the way in which business and corporations take up the task of managing labour, I can better understand employment engagement initiatives in the public sector. I maintain that organizations that mobilize these managerial discourses strengthen managers' position of power. Indeed, the critical literature on managerialism brings to light managerial technologies that mobilize employees' personal resources for the success of the organization (and the success of managers). What is missing is an analysis of the discourses that support contemporary managerial strategies, such as employee engagement. I want to trace discourse through a series of texts, which comprise a key part of a contemporary public sector employee engagement initiative. To undertake a study of the impact particular discourses have in shaping what employee engagement looks like, I need an approach to research that will focus on the text as well as provide insight into the way power works. CDA does both. I now turn to laying out the principles of CDA and describe how I undertook the study of "Being the Best" as an employee engagement strategy.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis, or CDA, analyzes “opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language” (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000, p. 448). This methodological approach to research aims to address social ‘wrongs’, which are those aspects of society that lead to injustice and inequality (Fairclough, 2001a, p. 236; Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p.168). CDA takes a social-constructionist view of social life, where social reality is maintained and affirmed in part by discourse (Titscher, Meyer, Wodak, & Vetter, 2007).

CDA “constitutes a theoretical nexus that gathers together different approaches” to understand how texts work within, support, and/or contest ideological structures (Stamou & Padeliadu, 2009, p.513). The theoretical foundation that supports CDA’s conception of discourse originates in Western Marxist thought. This philosophical line of reasoning focuses on the cultural and ideological aspects of a society through which exploitation and domination are established and maintained (Fairclough, 2001a, p. 232; Titscher et al., 2007, p. 145). CDA is used to analyse discourse to understand the role that it plays in the establishment, reproduction, and change of power relations and ideology in society. It also looks at the ways in which the dominant discourse is contested, criticized, and opposed. The three constitutive concepts of CDA are power, ideology, and critique (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p.1).

CDA investigates the ways in which discourse is linked to relations of power. Of particular interest is *social power*, defined as a characteristic of relations between social groups. Social power is organized and institutionalized. It provides access to privileged social resources such as money, status, and knowledge (van Dijk, 1992, p. 85; van Dijk, 2003, p. 355). Access to

these social resources allows groups and members of groups to control aspects of public discourse, including what can be said, who can say it, and when it can be said. Control of discourse is significant because it privileges certain views and knowledges over others and frames social conditions in favour of those who hold power (Mumby & Stohl, 1991; van Dijk, 1992). The use of social power by one group to dominate another group is viewed as a form of abuse; however, social power is not absolute and is often met with some degree of resistance. Individual power is not considered in the context of CDA (van Dijk, 1992).

Ideas contained in discourse function ideologically. Ideology is described as “a rich ‘system of representations,’ worked up in specific material practices, which helps form individuals into social subjects who ‘freely’ internalize an appropriate ‘picture’ of their social world and their place in it” (Kavanagh, 1995, p. 310). The dominant ideology, at its height of influence or hegemony, explains the political and social order of a society and legitimizes its hierarchies and power relations. Compliance with the order is achieved through the construction of subjects that are interwoven into the material practices of society. These material practices legitimise certain ways of being while excluding or erasing others (Chiapello & Fairclough, 2002; Mumby & Stohl, 1991).

A shared understanding of critique exists across all branches of Critical Discourse Analysis. CDA is critical because it strives to expose power relations and ideologies, particularly from the perspective of those who are negatively affected by them (Forchtner, 2010, p. 19). CDA as a methodology seeks to play a role in achieving positive social change by looking for ways in which discourse may be used to resist dominance and hegemony and identifying opportunities for change (Fairclough, 2001a, p. 230; Forchtner, 2010, p. 19). This critical approach is not limited to the discourse under analysis; the critical discourse analyst must also reflect critically

on her own standpoint. The analyst is encouraged to consider the assumptions and beliefs that she brings into the research and assess how they may influence the research project (Forchtner, 2010).

CDA is interested in complex phenomena. It, therefore, requires an interdisciplinary and multi-methodological approach (van Dijk, 2003, p. 352). Research materials commonly examined include written texts, radio ads, magazine articles, and conversations (Fairclough, 2001a, p. 229). Typical social domains that are of interest to discourse analysts range from politics, racism, and economic discourse to media language, institutional discourse, education, and gender studies (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000, pp. 450-451). CDA is interdisciplinary by nature, drawing on a range of disciplinary knowledges to address a particular topic. It is also transdisciplinary in that it not only borrows from multiple disciplines, but also “cuts across” these disciplines by producing new analytical methods and theories (Fairclough, 2001a, p. 230).

CDA was pioneered in the late 1980s by Ruth Wodak, Teun van Dijk, and Norman Fairclough (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000, p. 447; Weiss & Wodak, 2003, p. 35). Drawing from linguistic and social theory as well as psychology, they established an interdisciplinary approach to the study of discourse. Wodak drew on socio-linguistics and ethnography in her study of immigration, multilingualism, and organizational decision-making (Lancaster University, 2012a). She developed the discourse-historical approach to CDA. The aim of this approach is to “integrate texts of as many different genres as possible, as well as the historical dimension of the subject under investigation. The discourse-historical approach relates the content of the data with the strategies employed and their linguistic realizations” (Wodak, 1999, p. 188). Van Dijk adopted a socio-cognitive orientation to the study of discourse, which is founded on the notion that cognition is the mediator between discourse and society (Wodak & Busch, 2004, p. 110). He

is interested in the effects of discourse manipulation on the minds of dominated groups, particularly racialized groups. In his approach to CDA, van Dijk explores how the use of discourse technologies, such as thematic structures, semantic strategies, and rhetorical figures, influence mental models (van Dijk, 1992, p. 85). Fairclough is interested in “the place of language in social relations of power and ideology, and how language figures in processes of social change” (Lancaster University, 2012b, Research Interests). Contemporary social changes of particular interest to Fairclough include globalization, new capitalism, and neo-liberalism (Lancaster University, 2012b). Fairclough developed the dialectical-relational approach to CDA. This approach centers on the dialectical, or interactive, relationships between discourse and other elements of social practice, including subjects and their social relations, activities, objects, time, place, and values (Fairclough, 2009, p. 167).

I will employ Fairclough’s (2009) dialectical-relational approach in this study of power relations at the BC Public Service. This branch of CDA is useful for my research because it focuses on the role of discourse in the process of social change. As the literature review above demonstrates, the ideas associated with New Public Management are strongly linked to the neo-liberal discourse. This discourse is itself linked to changes in values in Western societies around the importance of the market and the role of government (and public servants), in supporting this market.

Other CDA methods I considered for this research included a critical feminist perspective as well as a Foucaultian poststructural approach. Lazar (2007) provides three reasons for a feminist CDA: many CDA research projects already implicitly adopt a critical feminist perspective; self-naming is important as it facilitates the organization of feminist discourse analysts; a feminist CDA adopts a “distinctly feminist politics of articulation” (Lazar, 2007, pp.

142-143). A feminist approach to CDA in the study of management ideas is relevant, as management ideology is informed by neo-liberalism. According to Lazar (2007), neo-liberalism in the context of the workplace “reframes women’s struggles and accomplishments as purely a personal matter, thus obscuring the social and material constraints faced by different groups of women” (para. 42). Although her notion that neo-liberalism obscures oppression is useful in my thinking about power at work, I did not select a feminist approach to CDA. I specifically wanted to explore how managerial strategies reframe the work of the public servant in terms of market values and help enforce these values.

Foucault provides an important account of the role of discourse in knowledge formation and how it is intertwined power. His version of power is described as “a continually shifting web or grid of individual positions of tension between power and resistance. Because of the inequality of the tension, local and unstable states of power and resistance are constantly being created, dissolved, reversed and reshuffled” (Powers, 2007, p. 29). For the purposes of my research on power relations within the BC Public Service, power takes on a more concrete form. The kind of power I am thinking about is institutional and derived from social structures. Fairclough’s dialectical-relational approach provides for this view of power because it acknowledges a social reality—not everything is relative. This is important for this research because it provides a theoretical space where social wrongs can exist and can, therefore, be righted.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that supports Fairclough’s approach to CDA is founded on the ideas of Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser (Titscher et al., 2007, p. 144). Classical Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci expanded on Karl Marx’s ideas and developed the concept of social

rule through *hegemony*. He conceptualized Karl Marx's superstructure as made up of two societies—a political society that operates through domination and coercion and a civil society that works through social rule. Ideas and values that support social rule permeate throughout civil society and diffuse into all aspects of social life. These ideas, or ideologies, are internalized by individuals and become the common sense and collective will of society (Fairclough, 2001a; Scholar, 1994; Titscher et al., 2007). Gramsci called this process of domination through social rule hegemony. He argued that the processes of social rule can only be understood through a society's historical context. It is by following history that we can track the rise and transformation of ideas as well as the influence of these ideas on structures of dominance and subordination in a society (Benton, 2003).

Louis Althusser, a Marxist philosopher, considered in more detail the way in which dominant ideas become the common sense and collective will of a society. He emphasized the interconnections between social, economic, and political structures (Benton, 2003). Marx's economic base and political/legal superstructure were conceived by Althusser as three interdependent spheres each with its own set of practices. The base of society is its site of economic production, which employs economic practices. The politico-legal structure is made up of legal and political rules that validate the economic base. Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) are social practices located in the private sphere. These include a society's institutions such as organized religion, the family unit, and the system of education (Hall, 2004). ISAs are ideological mechanisms that operate mainly through language to construct particular subject positions. They interpellate, or call, individuals to actions that sustain the dominant ideological order (Fairclough, 2001a; Hall, 2004; Althusser, 1970).

The Role of Language in Society

According to Fairclough (2001b), “there is a significant and ongoing ‘turn to language’ in contemporary social life—language is becoming an increasingly important element of social life” (p. 204). It represents more than a system of symbols and meanings; it is also a socially conditioned process determined by social structures (Fairclough, 2001b, p. 19). Written and spoken words and images, which constitute discourse, are ubiquitous in our society. They influence our daily lives and shape who we are: how we know what we know, what we value, and how we experience the world.

Evidence of this turn to language is the growing importance of the knowledge-based economy (Fairclough, 2001a, 2001b), an economy that is increasingly based on knowledge and information, where knowledge is produced, distributed, and used (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 1996, p. 7). To Fairclough (2001a), a knowledge-based economy is also a discourse-based economy, as “new knowledges are produced, circulated and applied in production as new discourses” (p. 231). Additional evidence of the growing role of language in social life is the technologization of discourse. Fairclough (2001b) coined this phrase, which he defines as “the more or less self-conscious application of social scientific knowledge for purposes of bureaucratic control” (p. 176). Discourse technologies, such as medical examinations, employment interviews, and official government records, form part of strategic discourse designed to achieve specific organizational goals (Fairclough, 2001b, p. 176), and are informed by the social science fields specializing in discourse and language. Fairclough (2001b) argues that the use of discourse technologies signals a fundamental and unprecedented change in the social orders of discourse and emphasises the importance of CDA as a social science research methodology.

The discourse technology of interest in this research project is a series of documents produced by the BC Public Service. These documents serve two key purposes: they provide broad direction on human resource management at the BC Public Service as well as market the public service as a great place to work. Both the content and layout of the documents are carefully crafted to shape the message.

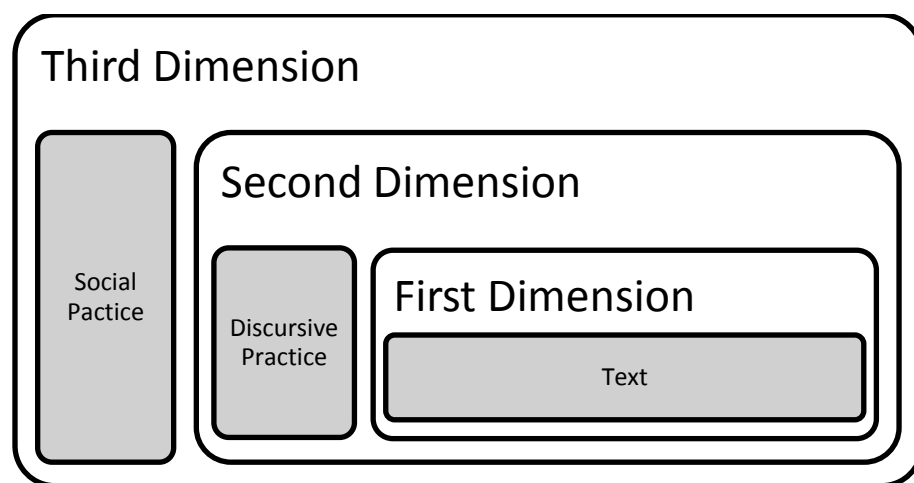
Dimensions of Analysis

CDA is a productive tool to understand how contemporary social life is shaped by language. To gain insights into the influence of discourse on society, CDA examines the “relationships between concrete language use and the wider social and cultural structures” (Fairclough, in Titscher et al., 2007, p. 149). CDA is grounded in the idea that language is a form of social practice. The idea of treating language as social practice is based on three assumptions: language does not have meaning outside its social context; language is grounded materially in day-to-day social practices; and social structures and subjectivities are articulated through discursive practices (Fairclough, 2001, pp. 18-19).

Fairclough (2001b) envisions discourse as a three-dimensional framework, depicted as three nested boxes, which illustrates their interdependence (p. 21) (see Fig. 1). The first dimension of the framework is the text (the smallest box nestled at the centre), which is a record of a written, verbal, or visual communication. It is the object of analysis in a CDA project (Titscher et al., 2007, p. 150). The second dimension is the discursive practice (the middle box). It includes the processes of production and interpretation of the text as well as the relationship between the discursive event and the other discourse dimensions (Titscher et al., 2007, p. 150). The third dimension (the outside box) of the framework is the social practice, which relates to the societal, situational, and institutional context of the discursive event. This dimension explains

the social relationships at play (Titscher et al., 2007, p. 150). The overall goal of the discourse analysis is to determine the relationship between these interrelated dimensions of discourse.

Figure 1. Fairclough's three dimensional framework



Source: Adapted from Fairclough [2001b], p. 21.

Discourse in social practice can play three roles. It can be a social activity, also called *genre*, such as a work meeting, a television interview, or a doctor's visit (Chiapello & Fairclough, 2002). Discourse in a social practice can also be the way participants represent themselves and others. An example of a particular discourse is the way poverty is represented at City Hall, or the way poverty is referred to in a social studies class (Chiapello & Fairclough, 2002). Finally, discourse can be the way participants constitute their identities in a social practice. Particular types of identities are called *styles*. Examples include the emerging young leader in a corporation, the veteran federal politician, or the undergraduate student at a university (Chiapello & Fairclough, 2002).

A set of social practices networked together in a particular way is called a *social order*. The discursive elements of a social order, such as its genres, styles and discourses, constitute an *order of discourse* (Chiapello & Fairclough, 2002). CDA is interested in the order of discourse of a text, which is the totality of the discursive practices of the particular institution (or 'social

field’) and the relationships between them (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Fairclough, 1992). The order of discourse of a text is significant to CDA because it represents a “particular social ordering of relationships amongst different ways of meaning making” (Chiapello & Fairclough, 2002, p. 194). In the social ordering, some meanings are dominant or mainstream while others are “marginal, or oppositional, or alternative” (Chiapello & Fairclough, 2002, p. 194). The social order is not natural, but is a result of power relationships or struggles for dominance. An example of a social order is capitalism, and a corresponding order of discourse is the spirit of capitalism, “characterized by dominant discourse (enacted as genres, inculcated as styles) but also by oppositional or alternative discourses (genres, styles)” (Chiapello & Fairclough, 2002, p. 194).

Critical Discourse Analysis in Practice

Fairclough (2009) considers the dialectical-relational approach to CDA to be a methodology as well as a method. It is a methodology because it represents a body of practices and general principles, and it is a method because it provides specific steps for doing the analysis (Fairclough, 2009, p. 167). The specific techniques used vary depending on how the object of research is constructed. In *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, Fairclough (2009) describes the dialectical-relational approach as having four stages. In the first stage, the analyst identifies a research topic that relates to a social concern that can, in theory, be addressed. Once the topic has been selected, the next step is to construct the research object by engaging with relevant theory from various disciplines in order to go “beyond and beneath the obviousness of the topic” (Fairclough, 2009, p. 168). The research object for this study is employee engagement discourse within the British Columbia Public Service. Theories that help identify the ideas around employee engagement include administrative management theory and organizational theory.

In the second stage of the dialectical-relational approach, the analyst seeks to understand the structure of social life that prevents the issue from being addressed. This is accomplished by identifying the dialectical relations between the text and other social elements (Fairclough, 2009, p. 169). The analyst first selects one or more relevant texts for analysis, keeping in mind how the object of study has been theoretically constituted, and then carries out interdiscursive and linguistic analyses of the selected text(s) (Fairclough, 2009, p. 170). An interdiscursive analysis identifies the range of discourses, genres and styles brought into play in a text (Stamou & Padeliadu, 2009, p. 514), while a linguistic analysis studies the linguistic features of a text, such as vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, and expressions (Fairclough, 2001b, p. 91). For this thesis research, the texts of interest are part of a series of BC Public Service human resource plans entitled “Being the Best”. This series of texts is an essential element of the human resource strategy at the BC Public Service, and it targets the employees of the BC Public Service. “Being the Best” is relevant for this study because it represents a window into managerial discourse at the BC Public Service. In the analysis, I examine the texts for contemporary management ideas and vocabulary consistent with those identified in the literature review (e.g. notions of efficiency, innovation and corporate culture). I also look at how the texts are designed (e.g. selection of images, layout, cover that depict managerialism ideals), as the form of a text is a reflection of the values and ideas it contains.

In the third stage, the analyst considers how the social order needs the social wrong and asks the following questions: How is ideology helping to maintain particular relations of power and domination? Is the social wrong inherent to the social order (Fairclough, 2009, p. 170)? To gain a better understanding of how ideologies produce and sustain relations of domination, the analyst assesses “the degree to which problems in their semiotic aspect are an insuperable part of

the social order as presently constituted" (Fairclough, 2001a, p. 238). I maintain that contemporary management strategies are obfuscating the power relations at work while also intensifying management control over employees. I believe that this is a form of social wrong. As I conduct the analysis, I consider the degree to which managerial discourse is an insurmountable aspect of the neo-liberal order.

In the fourth stage of Fairclough's dialectical-relational approach, the analyst looks for possibilities within the existing social process for addressing the social wrong. These possibilities appear as gaps and contradictions in the text (Fairclough, 2001a, 2009; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Fairclough (2001b) explains: "There is a constant endeavour on the part of those who have power to try to impose an ideological common sense which holds for everyone (...). But there is always *some* degree of ideological diversity, and indeed conflict and struggle, so that ideological uniformity is never completely achieved" (p. 71, original emphasis). In the analysis of "Being the Best", I examine the texts for conflicting and ambiguous ideas. These sites of conflict point to weaknesses in the dominant discourse and present an opportunity to challenge the common sense notions embedded in employee engagement discourse at the BC Public Service. Table 1 below summarizes the four stages of analysis and how I address each one in the study.

Table 1. Fairclough's Four Stages of Analysis and How Each is Addressed in this Study

Four Stages	Steps at Each Stage	How I Address Each Stage
Stage 1	• identify a research topic that relates to a social concern that can, in theory, be addressed • construct the research object by engaging with relevant theory from various disciplines	• the research topic is employee engagement initiatives at the BC Public Service • theories that help identify contemporary ideas around employee engagement include administrative management theory and organizational theory
Stage 2	• select one or more relevant texts for analysis • carry out interdiscursive and linguistic analyses of the selected text(s) • identify the dialectical relations between the text and other social elements	• the texts of interest are five editions of BC Public Service human resource plans, entitled "Being the Best" • I search the texts for contemporary management ideas and vocabulary consistent with those identified in the literature review (e.g. notions of efficiency, innovation and corporate culture) • I look at how the texts are designed (e.g. selection of images, layout, cover that depict managerialism ideals)
Stage 3	• consider how the social order needs the social wrong and ask the following questions: ◦ How is ideology helping to maintain particular relations of power and domination? ◦ Is the social wrong inherent to the social order?	• I assess the degree to which managerial discourse is inherent to the neo-liberal order
Stage 4	• look for possibilities within the existing social process for addressing the social wrong ◦ these possibilities appear as gaps and contradictions in the text	• I examine the texts for conflicting and ambiguous ideas, as they present an opportunity to challenge the common sense notions embedded in employee engagement discourse at the BC Public Service

The following discourse analysis centres on a series of BC Public Service strategic human resource plans entitled "Being the Best". In the interdiscursive analysis of these texts, I look at how discourses, genres, and styles are articulated together to support change management

at the BC Public Service. Discourses can have a transformative effect on social life when they are enacted as genres, inculcated as styles, and materialized in new technologies and ways of organizing space. The analysis draws from the literature in *Chapter 2*, as well as some of the linguistic and semiotic elements of the texts, to better understand the relationship between “Being the Best”, the discursive practices at the BCPSA, and the neo-liberal social order.

There are six editions of “Being the Best”, covering the years 2006 to 2012. Because the sixth edition was only released at the end of May 2012, after I had completed the analysis of the other five editions, I did not include it in the analysis. The five plans under study serve as marketing tools for the BC Public Service. The target audience for the first three editions comprises BC Public Service employees and those who are considering working for the BC Public Service. The fourth and fifth editions seem to have been written for employees only, and not intended as external marketing tools. There are two potential reasons for this. First, there was a change in leadership in 2009. The Deputy Minister to the Premier and Head of the BC Public Service, Jessica McDonald, was replaced by Allan Seckel. Second, because of the 2008 economic recession, there were fewer resources to hire from an external pool of labour in 2009 and 2010. The information content of “Being the Best” is arranged similarly across all five editions under study. Each edition begins with an introduction by the Deputy Minister to the Premier. It then gets into past accomplishments and lays out what is coming next, usually in bullet form. Each plan has the same three core goals: increase the internal capacity of the BC Public Service, improve the agency’s competitiveness, and “manage for results” (BCPSA, 2008a, p. 2.). On average, each plan is 28 pages long, and the range is 20 to 40 pages. All are in colour and contain images, designs, and bold headings. In addition to the five “Being the Best” documents, I also review two glossy fold-out pamphlets published in 2008 that support the

strategic plans. One is entitled “Spark! Igniting Ideas in the BC Public Service” and the other is called “What We Value – Courage, Passion, Service, Teamwork, Accountability, & Curiosity”.

For the textual analysis that follows, I did not follow an identifiable, formalized method. Rather, I began the analysis by reading the texts many times, as well as examining the photographs, figures, font choices, and other design features. I then highlighted words, phrases and images that formed part of the managerial discourse, based on the literature review. These selected words, phrases, and images were transferred to a table, which was organized into themes such as: transformative change, public servant identity, unified culture, managerial expressions (e.g. “horizontal integration”, “assess and realign”, “corporate expertise”, “job streams”, “streamline”), and authority (e.g. “individualized performance plans will define the role of every employee”; “every employee will receive an annual performance review”). Looking at these themes, and sorting them variously into groups again and again, I came up with three that I thought pulled together the significant elements of the managerial discourse. The three themes are *transformational change*, *public servant identity*, and *BC Public Service culture*. These themes are explored in the analysis.

Ethical Concerns

Before I launch into the analysis of “Being the Best”, there are some ethical concerns I want to discuss. I am currently an employee of the BC Public Service; therefore, I have access to some knowledge that those outside the organization do not have. I abided by the Standards of Conduct of the BC Public Service and treated all information received in the course of my work as confidential, including personal conversations with work colleagues. I also remained committed to the *Oath of Employment* and, to the best of my ability, placed the interests of my employer ahead of my own (BCPSA, 2008b). However, it is important to note that by producing

this research, my educational interests are served. My personal interest in management and power relations at work has also been served, and I certainly gained a sense of satisfaction and pride from completing this research. Nevertheless, my goal remains to produce research that benefits the BC Public Service and its employees, particularly front liners who are committed to providing helpful and timely service to the citizens of British Columbia.

The data set for this study are confined to written texts. These documents are not confidential. Although interviews with public servants could have produced a rich data set for this research, I chose not to take this approach because of ethical concerns, which included: the potential of bringing disrepute to the BC Public Service and the negative impacts this could have on my employment; the challenge of disentangling the dual role of researcher and employee (that is, managing power-over relationships as well as expectations); and the risk to participants (such as, in overt or covert ways that would possibly threaten a participant's employment in the BC Public Service). Even though I chose not to pursue interviews, there was more than sufficient information to be drawn from in the written texts to conduct a critical discourse analysis.

In the following analysis, which is based on Fairclough's four-stage approach, I explore managerial discourse and its intensifying effects on the relationships of power at the BC Public Service. To do this, I scan across the three dimensions of discourse. As I analyze "Being the Best", I keep in mind its processes of production and interpretation as well as its economic and political context. My wish for this study is that it will lead to opportunities to counter the negative impacts of managerial discourse and protect employees from increased subjugation.

Chapter Four: Critical Discourse Analysis of Being the Best

In this chapter, I present the results of an interdiscursive analysis of “Being the Best”. To inform this analysis, I employ the ideas uncovered in the literature review from *Chapter 2*, and I follow the methodology laid out in *Chapter 3*. The results of the analysis are organized into five parts. I begin by presenting the discursive elements of the texts that relate to transformational change. Each edition of “Being the Best” opens with the theme of unavoidable change as this is the foundation for the management strategy. I then explore features of the texts that reshape the public servant identity. Photographs of employees are particularly suitable in depicting the corporate identity. This is followed by an examination of those elements of the texts that redefine the BC Public Service culture. I then discuss the effects of the managerial discourse on relations of power within the organization. Finally, I look for contradictions in the texts that point to opportunities to resist the repressive consequences the discourse has on front line employees.

Being the Best – A Roadmap to Efficiency

In October 2006, the Deputy Minister to the Premier of British Columbia, Head of the BC Public Service, launched the first edition of the series, “Being the Best”. This first edition told the story of a public service that is “undergoing a significant transformation” (BCPSA, 2006, p. 1). In her Foreword, the Deputy Minister to the Premier described the human resource plan as a “roadmap” that leads the BCPSA boldly forward. She used words like “modernize”, “agile”, “productive”, “bold”, and “being the best” to describe this renewed vision of public service generally, and public servants specifically. The key drivers for this transformation include an aging workforce, national competition for skilled employees, increasing demands of employee’s personal lives, and changing needs and expectations of British Columbians. Other

factors include the global economy, emerging technologies, and a diversity of complex issues such as addressing climate change or British Columbia child poverty. The Deputy Minister to the Premier invited public servants to engage with this change: “A good plan will enable employees to become involved in helping shape these decisions and, most importantly, to participate actively in the progression of their individual careers” (BCPSA, 2006, p. 1). She adds: “Being the Best means re-shaping our organization as an employer of choice where people can have a diverse and rewarding career, be encouraged to explore new ideas and lead bold innovations, be inspired by seeing personal efforts translate into real outcomes, and feel valued and rewarded for making a difference” (BCPSA, 2010, p. 1).

The message from the deputy ministers following the introduction elaborates on the theme of change and explains that transformation is about “building a strong public service ... that has the capacity (leadership, motivation, skills and training) to keep pace with social, economic and technological changes” (BCPSA, 2006, p. 5). Public servants are called upon to take part in the transformation process: “Please take the time to review this document and consider your own thoughts on how to meet the challenges and opportunities ahead” (BCPSA, 2006, p. 5). From these first few pages of the 2006 edition of “Being the Best”, the message is clear: The BC Public Service is moving ahead with its transformation strategy and it is each employee’s responsibility to keep up with it.

“Being the Best – Province of British Columbia Corporate Human Resource Plan 2007/08 – 2009/10” was the second edition in the series. This edition was also focused on change: “We are fundamentally changing how the BC Public Service is seen and sees itself as an employer” (BCPSA, 2007, p. 3). This second human resource plan, which doubles as a marketing document, set a challenge for the BCPSA—to be recognized as the best public service

employer in Canada by 2008. The Deputy Minister to the Premier explained that this challenge was important to British Columbians because:

Yes, to be the best employer we need to offer our employees the support, recognition, and opportunities they need to pursue their professional goals. But to be the best public service employer in Canada requires us to do more than that because we carry a unique responsibility to the people we serve. Unlike our private-sector competitors, our work is not driven by a single bottom line. Our purpose is to support the administration in meeting British Columbia's social, environmental and economic goals – and to do that to the highest professional and ethical standards. (BCPSA, 2007, p. 3)

This excerpt from the second edition pulled together several notions to shape a new narrative for the BC Public Service. It suggests that the public sector is in competition with the private sector, namely, “our public sector competitors” (BCPSA, 2007, p. 3), thus implying that the public sector is operating under the same business environment as the private sector. For this reason, public institutions are now required to be competitive. “Being the Best” is the BC Public Service's strategy to compete successfully in a changing economic and demographic environment. Although the public and private sectors were now on a level playing field in terms of competition for human resources, there remains one difference. The risks of not successfully competing in this new environment were much higher for the public service, given that it was responsible for the environmental, social and economic well-being of British Columbians. To ensure the strategy was effective, employees were asked to put their self-interests aside: “Yes, to be the best employer we need to offer our employees the support, recognition, and opportunities they need... But” (BCPSA, 2007, p. 3, my emphasis). Instead, they were called to be team

players and to engage in their work with “the highest professional and ethical standards” (BCPSA, 2007, p. 3).

“Being the Best 3.0 Human Resource Plan 2008/2009 – 2010/2011” was the largest edition at 38 pages. It was still very much focused on transformation, as suggested by these section headers: “Reshaping the Work We Do”, “Improving Our Employment Experience”, and “Growing Green”. To give strength to the story of a public service in crisis, this edition included a six-page section entitled, “The BC Public Service Our Future, B.C.’s Future”. It included statistics and graphs intended to clarify the challenge facing the public service. It forecasted the impacts this challenge would have and explained why it mattered to British Columbians. One scenario forecasts a shortage of 160,000 workers in 2016 in the Province of British Columbia. The BC Public Service concluded that “even if we were as competitive as we could be in recruiting top talent ... we will not be able to fill every vacancy that will arise” (BCPSA, 2008a, p. 31). The consequence of this was illustrated in a graph that compared the number of BC Public Service employees to the population of British Columbia between 1970 and 2016. In 2016, the number of public servants was a third smaller than in 1970; however, there is expected to be almost twice as many British Columbians. The evidence is clear—BC Public Service employees would have to be much more efficient and productive in their work if they were going to deliver the same degree of services to British Columbians in future.

In “Being the Best 3.0”, the urgency to address the challenges facing the BC Public Service was emphasized. In her message, the Deputy Minister to the Premier asked the following questions:

Is it possible to fundamentally change the way the BC Public Service operates as an employer? Is it possible to make us a more competitive, more flexible, more dynamic employer than we have ever been? Should we compete with the private sector or even other public sector employers? Can we? (BCPSA, 2008a, p. 4)

“The answer to every one of those questions”, she says, “is yes – because it is the right thing to do, and because it is something we must do” (BCPSA, 2008a, p. 4, my emphasis). Clearly, embarking on a change initiative was not optional. There was no room for debate—fundamental change was a moral imperative!

“Being the Best 3.0” not only emphasizes the urgency of change, but also broadened the scope of change to include all aspects of the BC Public Service. The rationale for this far-reaching change was that, no matter how effective the human resource strategy, there would remain a shortage of employees. For this reason, the change initiative aimed to change the culture of the public service, so that the organization could become more efficient and effective. Ultimately, the responsibility for success rested on the employees of the public service.

[T]he public service must be prepared to change not just its approach to human resource issues but also its approach to service delivery.

That has already begun, as work is underway on evaluating how government operations can change to become more efficient and more responsive than ever before. That is why the public service is emphasizing the need to build a true culture of innovation – because new and more efficient ways of working can be

found and implemented. Whether it means applying new technology, integrating services across ministries, or reshaping traditional job streams, the ultimate goal is to deliver increasingly quality services with fewer people. Again, this is not a choice – it is driven by market and demographic forces. Technology will provide part of the solution. But the employees of the BC Public Service will be the key to overcoming this massive challenge. (BCPSA, 2008a, p. 32)

“Being the Best 4.0 Human Resource Plan 2009/10 – 2011/12” was published shortly after the 2008 stock market crash. In his foreword, the Deputy Minister to the Premier reframed the change narrative to accommodate the economic recession. The storyline before the recession was that government would grow smaller due to changing demographics and labour competition, necessitating a new approach to work. After the recession, he told the story of a government that was smaller due budget ‘pressures’, which also required a new approach to work. Because a human resource strategy was already in place, the public service will be better prepared to deliver services.

Without question, the last year has been the most difficult we have faced as an employer since we released the first edition of Being the Best. But in some ways it has also been the most reassuring, as economic and revenue pressures have tested and proven our commitment to the vision we set out in 2006 and challenged us to both adjust and accelerate our plan in many ways.

Despite the uncertainty of the last year, Being the Best remains firmly in place as the guiding force behind the transformation of the BC Public Service as an employer. Our motivations have not changed. This plan is driven, as much as ever,

by the understanding that our ability to deliver services to British Columbians is intimately linked to our success as a competitive employer. (BCPSA, 2009, p. 4)

The success of the public service in addressing economic challenges from the recession will be, according to the deputy ministers, because the organization had “come together as one” (BCPSA, 2010, p. 6). This reinforces the importance of a shared culture that was centered on flexibility, efficiency and collaboration.

One lesson we have seen reaffirmed clearly is that we are a strong and more effective organization when we come together as one. Establishing a more unified corporate culture has been a hallmark of Being the Best from the very beginning. That is primarily motivated by a need to have a more nimble, mobile workforce that will help us meet the challenge of being a smaller organization in the future. But we also recognize that a more collaborative approach across government holds a significant potential to make us more effective and efficient in delivering services. (BCPSA, 2009, p. 6)

“Being the Best 2010/2011” was the final edition of the series. It was smaller and plainer than the previous four and was clearly intended for employees. The Deputy Minister to the Premier’s message is passionate and empathetic as he responds to the impacts of change on employee engagement and called employees to unite behind the goals of “Being the Best.

While we are moving beyond budget pressures and the related workforce reductions that had such an impact on engagement, many areas of the public service are now working through significant reorganizations. I know that is hard. I know it continues to challenge many of our employees. I know it may make some of you question our commitment to the vision set out in this plan. But I can tell you my

personal commitment to that vision has never been stronger. I continue to believe this is the most exciting time to be part of the BC Public Service. I hope you agree, and I hope you embrace the opportunities it presents for us all. (BCPSA, 2010, p. 3)

Although demographics and labour market forces remain important drivers for change, the storyline in this final edition is focused on shifting the culture of the BC Public Service. This new culture provides a common vision around which to marshal employees, as well as an avenue to improve employee engagement.

Our true objective is to transform the culture of the BC Public Service to one that offers a more positive and productive employment experience. We know that will lead us to improved retention, recruitment and engagement, which in turn lead to better service to the public. (BCPSA, 2010, p. 2)

A review of the five first editions of “Being the Best” reveals that the approach taken by executives to lead change at the BC Public Service was consistent with Diefenbach’s (2007) observations about organizational change management. The Deputy Minister to the Premier first constructed a crisis to which a response was required. The response was the human resource plan, “Being the Best”, which was described as the only ‘right’ approach to addressing the crisis. The corporate human resource plans provided both the destination and the route to get there—it was the BC Public Service’s roadmap to efficiency. This organizational change roadmap consists of three goals, which remain consistent across all five editions of “Being the Best”. For this reason, I organize the discussion on public servant identity and corporate culture around these goals.

Reshaping the Public Servant Identity

The three goals of the “Being the Best” are to build internal capacity, improve competitiveness and manage for results. These are in agreement with a neo-liberal understanding of organizational management as described in *Chapter 2*. For each of the goals, specific objectives are defined, which vary from edition to edition. In the following analysis, I turn my attention to the goals and objectives of “Being the Best” as they define the ideal public servant identity, and in so doing specify the expected behaviours of employees.

Goal 1 – Investing in our people by promoting mobility and providing a wide variety of work experiences, carefully planning and managing our use of external resources, creating more entry level positions as a “greenhouse” for future capacity, and developing specific internal expertise in key streams. (BCPSA, 2006, p. 12)

Goal 1 was focuses on training and development to increase the capacity of the BC Public Service. Common words used when describing this goal included mobility, opportunity, flexibility, and growth. This goal was about building, investing in or growing people by providing a wide variety of work experiences, promoting “lateral transfers” across ministries, and “creating more entry level positions as a ‘greenhouse’ for future capacity” (BCPSA, 2006, p. 11). Goal 1 emphasizes career development and “developing expertise in specific job streams” (BCPSA, 2007, p. 6). A variety of programs have been developed to support employees as they advanced in their careers, such as additional management and leadership training, scholarships for participation in post-secondary education programs, a partnership with CUSO-VSO to allow employees to take a leave of absence to serve with CUSO-VSO for up to two years, a Career Planning Workbook to help employees map out their career, and a “supervisor’s framework”

designed “to strengthen the effectiveness of the supervisory role” (BCPSA, 2009, p. 12). To what end? What sort of public servant is being created?

Goal 1 also spawned objectives around technology as a means to increase capacity at the public service. “Spark!”, a collaborative social media tool, was launched in 2008. This tool was designed to facilitate collaboration and innovation across government as well as “enhance the culture of horizontal integration and cross-government, citizen-centred approaches” (BCPSA, 2008c, p. 12). As part of the program, the BC Public service produced an eight-page fold-out booklet entitled, “Spark! Igniting Ideas in the BC Public Service”. The contents of this booklet concerned the re-shaping of the culture of the BC Public Service, as well as the identity of the public servant, around the concept of innovation. Following is an excerpt, which defines the innovative person:

An innovative person is someone who likes to get beneath the surface and understand how things work so we can make them better.

It is someone who has the tenacity to challenge the status quo when it makes sense, and the wisdom to let an idea go when it fails.

It is someone who can change course when circumstances demand change.

And we believe every BC Public Service employee can be that person. (BCPSA, 2008c, The Innovative Person)

This excerpt re-works the identity of the public servant in a way that is consistent with a managerial view. The new public servant is self-driven, adapted easily to change, always looked for new ideas, and networked across the organization to share these ideas. The innovative employee would “tap into the intellect and creativity within” (BCPSA, 2008c, The Innovative Person) to resolve the issues faced by the BC Public Service. At first look, it seems reasonable to

expect that employees should be self-driven, adaptable and interested in new ideas, but upon further consideration, some concerns arise. As Costea et al. (2007) argue, managerialism operates at the level of subjectivity and breaks down the boundary between work and the self. They note that breaking down the barrier between the self and work is not about eroding the “integrity of the whole person”, but about “liberating the entire ‘self’, releasing it from the erstwhile shackles of ‘Taylorism’/’Fordism’ or the ‘Protestant ethic’” (Costea et al., 2007, p. 250). This understanding of managerialism can be applied to the innovative person, who is clearly free from the shackles of Taylorism as he or she gets “beneath the surface” of things. The innovative person can access personal strengths for the benefit of the organization. Although there is a sense of independence associated with the notion of the innovative person, this notion is illusory because in this model more of the self is at work for the organization. The site of managerial control has been “displaced to a significant extent from external authority to inner attributes of the subject who is urged to self-manage” (Costea et al., 2007, p. 253).

While Goal 1 re-imagines the public servant as a nimble employee seeking ways to increase his or her capacity and experience, Goal 2 re-creates the image of the public service as a more exciting, open and creative place to work.

Goal 2 – Establishing a higher profile for the public service in the external marketplace through marketing and recruitment efforts, opening all competitions to external candidates, modernizing hiring practices, establishing competitive employment packages, and developing partnerships with post-secondary institutions and other employers. (BCPSA, 2006, p. 14)

In other words, Goal 2 is concerned with increasing the reach of the public service in labour markets (BCPSA, 2006, p. 14). Key concepts related to this goal center on recruitment, private-

sector competition, modernization, partnership development, and branding. The terms “market” and “corporate” are used repeatedly. The corporate brand, “Where Ideas Work” in 2007, signals “a commitment to employee ingenuity, innovation and ideas” (BCPSA, 2007, p. 13). Building a sense of community and culture is a key theme—“Integrate the Where Ideas Work brand more deeply as part of a cultural change that builds a sense of community among the BC Public Service” (BCPSA, 2007, p. 15). The cover of the 2007 edition of “Being the Best” illustrates the BC Public Service’s commitment to marketing the BC Public Service as a great place to work. The cover has bright colours and bold text, features the new brand, “Where Ideas Work”, and presents some of the friendly and happy employees of the BC Public Service.

Objectives under Goal 2 center on increasing the marketability of the BC Public Service and included flexible benefits programs, workplace wellness programs (e.g. online fitness tracking programs), and flexible work options to support work-life balance. For example, there is a program that allows employees to order fitness equipment and memberships, computers, and other items at a discount.

The 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games, hosted by the City of Vancouver, represents an important opportunity to market the BC Public Service and nurture a sense of pride in employees: “The BC Public Service has seized the potential of being the host province for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games, offering unique opportunities for employees to share in the experience” (BCPSA, 2009, p. 22). The two photographs below show the pride of employees who helped support the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games. The first photograph features employees selected to work at the BC Canada Pavilion, in Beijing, China, striking a pose of triumph. The second photograph highlights two employees who participated in the 2010 Olympic Torch Relay. They are outfitted in the Olympic attire and are proudly carrying the

Olympic torch. These images play a role in shaping the identity of public servants as enthusiastic employees, who take advantage of opportunities and are committed to growth and development. They also show that work can be personally fulfilling, as the caption that accompanies the photographs explains: “These two know an incredible opportunity when they see it, and both say their torch time memories will last a lifetime” (BCPSA, 2009, p. 23).

Images and layout are important in developing a fresh representation of the public servant at the BC Public Service. The first edition has a serious and formal look that more closely reflect the traditional idea of a public servant. The full-page photograph below features a District Supervisor for Employment and Income Assistance sitting in her office. Familiar social symbols are present in the image, such as the family photograph and wedding ring. These symbols signal that the BC Public Service is a great place to work for women, as mothers and members of traditional families. Another photograph features Aman Nijjar, a human resource consultant of non-Caucasian background, indicating that the BC Public Service is a diverse workplace. The fourth edition of “Being the Best” is more colourful and dynamic. It features seven employees, in full-page colour photographs, who exemplify the ‘new’ values and characteristics of the BC public servant. The target audience is clearly the younger demographic, as more than half of the employees showcased in this edition looked to be in their 20s and 30s. The vocabulary used in the image captions is less formal and includes popular expressions, such as “Manager of Awesome Projects”, “as a newbie to government”, “make friends all over the place”. All the photographs are taken outside the office, generally in a context not associated with the workplace. For example, Carla, an Aboriginal youth intern, is sitting on a seawall featuring First Nations designs. Allison is standing by wall painted with graffiti. A modern red chair is used as a prop in each of the seven photographs, representing, perhaps, the unifying vision of the BC

Public Service. In the final edition of “Being the Best”, there are no images of employees; however, two well-selected quotes from employees are featured. These highlight the excitement and passion employees have for their work and the Government 2.0 initiative launched by the BC Public Service.

Goal 1 and Goal 2 focus on employee development and re-branding the public service as a great place to work. Goal 3 is about delivering on the provincial government commitments.

Goal 3 – Changing the work environment to achieve enhanced productivity, greater innovation and improved workplace health and employee engagement. (BCPSA, 2006, p. 16)

Goal 3 aims to change the work environment to increase the productivity of the BC Public Service as well as make work “more rewarding and exciting” (BCPSA, 2006, p. 16). It draws a clear link between employee engagement and productivity. It focuses on how public servants do their work and is defined by creative solutions, strong employee engagement, workplace health, increased productivity, and striving for excellence. The concept of culture is central to this goal and focuses on corporate identity, professional values, collaboration, and Government 2.0. To support cultural transformation, six corporate values are identified in the 2009 edition of “Being the Best”: curiosity, passion, service, accountability, courage and teamwork. Integrity is an overarching value of the BC Public Service. A supplement to “Being the Best 3.0” entitled, “What We Value – Courage, Passion, Service, Teamwork, Accountability, & Curiosity” is produced to promote these professional values. The eight-page fold out booklet defines the public service values and highlights the importance of integrity. Following is an excerpt on integrity:

“**Integrity**” was the single word most often put forward by employees as a value that defines the BC Public Service. Recognizing the clear importance of integrity to employees and the organization, it now stands as a single overarching characteristic of the public service.

There is no sliding scale of integrity – you have it or you do not. To perform with integrity is to uphold both the Standards of Conduct for the BC Public Service and to make the individual choice to do what is right as a professional public servant. True public service cannot exist without an individual and shared commitment to integrity. We will demonstrate the values and we will do so always with integrity above all else. (BCPSA, 2008d, Integrity, original emphasis)

Integrity in this excerpt is defined as something that you either have or do not have; there is no compromise when it comes to integrity. An employee who demonstrates integrity upholds the Standards of Conduct of the BC Public Service and makes “the individual choice to do what is right as a professional public servant”. What is ‘right’ is not explicitly described; however, it is easy to infer that it is linked to the six professional values of the BC Public Service highlighted in the booklet. These six values are carefully defined. Following is an excerpt that highlights courage as a public service value

The BC Public Service is, more than ever before, faced with a host of challenges that demand the courage to adapt, change and innovate. That’s why we value employees who approach their work with the courage to:

- Take thoughtful risks in generating and implementing ideas.
- Be biased toward action.
- Apply imagination.

- Empower others to take initiative even in uncertain times.
- Look beyond the process to see the possible.
- Pursue a vision for the future. (BCPSA, 2008c, Courage)

The notion of courage as a public service value raises concerns. The definition of courage is rewritten in this booklet to fit the context of the workplace, and in doing so, it seems to overstate the notion of courage as a public servant value. For example, the idea that an employee is demonstrating courage when empowering others extends the definition beyond its standard meaning, as courage is more commonly associated with accessing personal strength in the face of danger, fear, pain and grief. The behaviours listed in the excerpt, which are offered as demonstrations of courage at work, are not really about courage, but more about valued behaviours at the BC Public Service. This is important given that the six professional values are used as measures of employee performance. To be courageous at work, an employee must demonstrate the correct set of behaviours, regardless of whether or not courage was required. Supposing an employee is courageous at work, but the behaviour does not fit the definition of courage, how will this be assessed?

The enactment and assessment of values at work is problematic. What is more troubling, however, is that through the establishment of these values, organizational management enters into the realm of the personal. Costea et al. (2007) argue that managerialism has redefined the concept of work as a process that enables the self to achieve its full potential. The performance appraisal is a key tool to encourage employees to engage in the practice of self-inspection and self-management. Through the performance appraisal, the employee had the opportunity, with the help of the manager, to evaluate how well he or she was enacting the proper behaviours and inculcating the appropriate characteristics or values. This had the effect of transferring

managerial control from an external authority to the employee in the form of self-management (Costea et al., 2007, p. 254). “What We Value” encourages the same process of self-discovery and self-work through the establishment and evaluation of public servant values. Employees were encouraged to sit down with their managers to discuss the ways in which they demonstrated the values, as well as how they could improve on these values in future. Employee performance assessments certainly bear a resemblance to the ‘therapeutic habitus’ described by Costea et al. (2007), where the ‘habitus’ referred to the employee’s intellectual and moral virtues and the ‘therapeutic’ referred to self-examination and confessional.

These values will increasingly become part of how the BC Public Service works, how we evaluate our work, and how we promote that shift to a stronger, more unified corporate culture. They will become essential elements of employee rewards and recognition, orientation, learning and training. They will influence our hiring and career path policies and, in support of that, they will be incorporated into our performance management framework as a way to recognize the value of the attitude and approach employees bring to their jobs. (BCPSA, 2008d, The Role of values)

Redefining the Corporate Culture

The three goals of “Being the Best” reshape the identity of the public servant into a person who was innovative, had integrity, and embodied professional values. This new identity is evaluated through the employee performance appraisal, which requires employees to assess the degree to which they engaged elements of the self into their work, e.g. courage, curiosity and passion. A key goal of establishing common values for all public servants is to create a uniform culture across the public service. Costea et al. (2007), in their review of the evolution of new

management ideology, identify organizational culture as central to managerialism. The intent behind managing the culture of the organization is to position employees around a collective identity “underpinned, however, by the attributes of an autonomous, ‘empowered’ working subject with a ‘reengineered’ mentality of organizational membership” (Costea et al., 2007, p. 248). To help justify the establishment of a new organizational culture at the BC Public Service, “Being the Best” contrasts this new culture against the traditional culture. The two cultures are depicted as being at odds; only the new culture allows the BC Public Service to adapt a changing economic and social environment.

A number of dynamics drive culture change in large organizations, including technological change, demographics, evolving employer business needs and shifting employee expectations. There is also an increasing recognition that traditional corporate cultural models are not as effective as they could be. The rigid organizational structures and often inflexible employer-employee relationships of the past are now understood to impede productivity and progress. And so, like many organizations, the BC Public Service is embracing a major shift from a culture focused on processes to one focused on outcomes, from highly siloed to more open, from an approach in which information is locked down to one in which it is shared, from seeking homogeneity to embracing diversity, from prescribed work hours and tools to flexibility and personalization, from entitlement to participation, and from command and control to communicate and collaborate. (BCPSA, 2010, p. 7)

This dualistic approach to framing organizational change (that is, new versus old or good versus bad) is not unique to the BC Public Service. Maravelias (2003) notes a number of

academic works claiming the “emergence of a new post-bureaucratic form of organization” (p. 547), defined by the ways in which it was *different* than the traditional bureaucracy (e.g. dynamic rather than stale; organic instead of structured; flexible rather than rigid). However, he also argues that the post-bureaucracy is not a break from the old model, but an extension of it. What set the two notions apart is the degree to which the post-bureaucratic organization is engaged with the discourse of managerialism. The same argument could be made about the BC Public Service. The new organization that “Being the Best” describes is not a break from the bureaucratic model—the structure of the organization remained the same. What was new about the organization is its open adoption of NPM, which serves to reclaim and intensify the prerogative of management. It does so primarily by transforming the culture of the organization and placing the self at the center of scrutiny.

Culture is a common thread across all five editions of “Being the Best” and was the main focus of the final edition. The text claims that culture has “a profound impact on employee engagement, which in turn shape an employer’s competitiveness and performance” (BCPSA, 2007, p. 7). Culture, defined as the “attitudes, beliefs and practices that define the employment experience” (BCPSA, 2010, p. 7), and its transformation have the potential to be a productive venue through which to achieve organizational goals. However, there is a barrier to employees actually embracing this new culture—trust. In the following excerpt, the notions of trust and responsibility are brought together to address potential resistance to the change initiative.

The importance of culture has always been at the heart of Being the Best, and that importance is why it is the emphasis of this fifth edition.

This kind of shift requires not just new policies and procedures but also a new attitude on behalf of the employer and employees built on the nexus of trust and

responsibility. Traditionally, the public service has been managed to minimize risk above all else. But the BC Public Service has always been a workforce comprised of trusted professionals. It should be managed based on that trust and the confidence that employees will conduct themselves responsibly and embrace the opportunity to make a constructive contribution to the corporate conversation. Rather than managing in fear of the potential for something going wrong, the BC Public Service will manage to maximize the potential of all that can go right. This approach is a profound shift from past practice. It requires increased openness and honesty. It requires flexibility and a willingness to have constructive and sometimes challenging conversations. But more than anything it requires a willingness for the employer and employees to trust each other in supporting a common goal. Steps have been taken in this direction already, but more can and will be done. This relationship is at the heart of the culture being built in the BC Public Service, and it offers great benefits for employees and the citizens they serve. (BCPSA, 2010, p. 7)

The construction of a nexus of trust and responsibility was a strategy to pre-empt criticism and resistance by employees. The tactic is effective because it functions by reminding employees that the success of the initiative relies on their willingness to “embrace the opportunity to make a constructive contribution to the corporate conversation” (BCPSA, 2010, p. 7). By embracing change as set out in “Being the Best”, employees demonstrate the professionalism that the BC Public Service is known for. Failure to support the plan, however, reinforces the need for the strategic initiative laid out in “Being the Best”. Those who resist change served as justification for the change. As Willmott (1997, in Diefenbach, 2007) argued,

disparaging the workforce (even indirectly as is done in the excerpt above) reinforced leaders' privilege to push for and direct organizational transformation.

Relations of Power at the BC Public Service

NPM discourse is helping to maintain relations of power at the BC Public Service by representing the organization and its employees in a particular way. As this analysis suggests, NPM values feed into the structure of the proposed transformation by mapping out what it is to be the best through a definition of the ideal public servant identity and the transformation of corporate culture. NPM views public sector organizations through a business or corporate lens. The assumption behind this model of management is that organizations that adopt a corporate approach are more able to keep pace with the changing economy. The NPM model calls for public sector organizations to be more competitive, which requires a more innovative and flexible workforce. Its strategy is to position employees around a collective corporate identity, while at the same time asking employees to adopt a more entrepreneurial spirit. NPM discourse not only allows government leadership to maintain management control, but also results in a stronger alignment between the BC Public Service and the dominant neo-liberal ideology. The following discussion on relations of power at the BC Public Service begins with managerial control followed by a discussion of the role of NPM discourse in helping to sustain neo-liberal dominance.

An important objective of NPM is to “recover the managerial prerogative” (Costea et al. 2007, p. 248). It does so by managing the culture of the organization. A key theme of “Being the Best” is cultural transformation. While the old culture is locked down, siloed, stale, rigid, and controlling, the new culture encourages employees to be nimble, passionate, creative, courageous, and results-oriented. It empowers employees to self-actualize through work and to

“activate the energy, the cultural glue and competence inherent in communities” (Maravelias, 2003, pp. 590-550). Consistent with the NPM model, “Being the Best” encourages a more open and communitarian approach to work, where employees were urged to participate, communicate and collaborate. Despite the eagerness with which “Being the Best” advances the notion of a horizontal organization, where employees can challenge status quo, empower others to take calculated risks, etc., the hierarchical framework and its various levels of authority remain in place. Employees are called upon to take responsibility for the organization as if it were flat, organic and (perhaps) more egalitarian, without receiving the corresponding authority or power. The privilege they receive instead is the emancipation from bureaucratic constraints and the opportunity to achieve personal success through work.

“Being the Best” markets the idea of work at the BC Public Service as empowering, organic and dynamic, but in reality, the BC Public Service retains its command and control in a hierarchical structure. Political leaders assign priorities and budgets; executives give direction; and managers allocate and evaluate the work. The deployment of the rhetoric of collaboration, creativity, integrity, etc., is a useful strategy to maintain control because it permits sharing organizational responsibilities without having to share authority. In this managerial model, responsibility and authority are separated. Responsibility for achieving organizational outcomes is displaced onto employees, who are managed through self-regulation and self-understanding. Authority and its associated privileges, however, remain with those in the higher levels of the hierarchy. Through the performance appraisal, employees with assistance from their managers assess the level to which they embody the public servant identity. They ask: Did I meet expectations? Did I work beyond expectations? What are my goals for improvement? As Costea et al. (2003) explained, through the “new managerial discourses and practices ... the self *qua* self

is constituted as the central object of management” (abstract, original emphasis). This approach to management is not limited to front line employees, but also applies to supervisors, managers and other non-executive employees, that is, the entire public service workforce.

Although “Being the Best” was designed as a strategy to manage front line employees, executives are not exempt from the influences of NPM discourse. They are also subjected to NPM technologies (e.g. management tools and vocabularies), but through different texts and different discursive and social practices. It is very likely that a number of executives at the BC Public Service have been coached in NPM leadership, participating in professional business programs, and reading popular management books. For example, Rosabeth Moss Kanter, who is considered a management guru, has published an impressive array of books and journal articles written specifically for executives. Examples of titles include: “The Change Masters: Innovation for Productivity in the American Corporation”; “The Enduring Skills of Change Leaders”; “Leadership for Change: The Rest of the Story”; and “The New Managerial Work”. These works provide a template for leaders to follow in terms of how to they should act, what they should value, and so on. Since managerialism operates at the level of subjectivity, it is likely that executives are also encouraged to self-manage. It is tempting to think of executives as all powerful. After all, they do have the authority to say what work will be done, who will do it, and by when. They can rearrange work teams, dismiss employees, and redeploy staff, and they have access to resources to launch change management strategies like “Being the Best”. However, executives are also the subject of managerial discourse; they too enact genres and inculcate styles but they take their cues from different social practices.

The deployment (or, indeed, redeployment) of NPM discourse across the BC Public Service by way of “Being the Best” helps to maintain existing power relations between the

echelons of the organization by holding the hierarchy in its place. It also helps maintain relations of power between the dominant neo-liberal ideology and the BC Public Service. Neo-liberal ideology is a system of representations about society, where society is subjected to the judgement and morality of capital. NPM is a specific neo-liberal representation and set of material practices that apply to public sector organizations. It emphasizes business values such as cost effectiveness, productivity, accountability, competition, and performance. It subjects the organization and its employees to appraisal in terms of these values, thereby maintaining neo-liberalism's dominance. This was the main goal of the strategic resource plan, "Being the Best". It focuses on re-shaping the identity of the public servant and the culture of the organization, namely, its 'attitudes, beliefs and practices', in ways consistent with the neo-liberal dogma. However, as Fairclough (2001b) explains, "there is always *some* degree of ideological diversity ... so that ideological uniformity is never completely achieved" (p. 31, original emphasis). This diversity leads to "gaps and contradictions" in the texts, which point to sites of struggle between different sets of beliefs, ideas and values (Fairclough, 2001b, p. 31). Indeed a few sites of struggle emerged in the texts, where two belief systems converged. These are discussed below.

Ideological Gaps and Contradictions as Opportunities for Change

Although managerial discourse prevailed in the BC Public Service texts, traces of the traditional public administration discourse were also present. Whereas the NPM model valued outcomes and efficiency, the traditional public administration model emphasized process and accountability. At several points in the texts, these opposing views were perceptible. For example, the contrary notions of efficiency and accountability were articulated together in the texts. Accountability requires tighter hierarchical controls, while efficiency entails a loosening of

control. Because the BC Public Service is accountable to the public, its leaders are required to find a balance between these two values—efficiency cannot fully displace accountability. The traditional value of accountability takes on a new meaning in the texts. It is now about placing “greater focus on accountability for results rather than for process” (Kernaghan, 2000, p. 96). While “Being the Best” uses language that suggests a flatter and more open organization (e.g. ‘diversity’, ‘participation’, and ‘communicate and collaborate’), the hierarchical structure of the organization does not change. What does change is the site of responsibility and managerial control, which shifts from the bureaucratic process to the realm of the self.

Another contradiction that emerges in the texts is around the morality of service. In the traditional model, services are provided by the civil service to its *citizens*, whereas in the NPM model, services are delivered to *clients and customers* by agencies that are often at arms-length from government, or even by contractors. “Being the Best” oscillates between the two notions. On the one hand, the human resource plans advocate a NPM approach to work; on the other hand, the language they employ is more in line with the traditional model: “And how will it continue to provide services to the people of B.C.?” (BCPSA, 2008a, p. 30); “It shapes how nearly 30,000 work together on behalf of the more than four million British Columbians” (BCPSA, 2010, p. 21). The responsibility of government continues to be the provision of common goods, not private goods, despite the deployment of managerial discourse in “Being the Best”.

Tensions in the texts point to a struggle between ideologies, where the producers of the texts may have wrestled over language to bring together different sets of ideas, values, and assumptions. This ideological conflict suggests there may be opportunities for change—the notion of the public service as a corporation and public servants as entrepreneurs has not yet

been made to appear completely ‘normal’ or ‘natural’. The traditional notion of public service continues to be relevant. Accountability, such as responsibility for the use of resources and adherence to rules and procedures, is still an important practice in the BC Public Service. Professionalism, ethics, democracy, and the law continue to be key public service values. How can the struggle between ideologies be employed to address social wrongs? How can the notion of work be redefined, so that it protects rather than manipulates the inner attributes of the self? How can the assumption that the public service should be “*accountable* in terms of competition” be challenged (Connell et al., 2010, p. 334, original emphasis)?

There are no easy answers to resolve the questions posed above. Occasionally, it is possible for employees to trigger change within the BC Public Service. For example, in 2009, when the six professional values of the public servant were introduced as part of the employee performance assessment, there was enough opposition from employees that leaders terminated the entire performance management system. A new performance management system was later introduced that reflected the feedback received by employees. It is also possible for employees to resist oppressive discourse by consciously refusing to internalize the identity that it represents. This is difficult to accomplish for several reasons. To communicate effectively in the public service, in writing or orally, it is often necessary to engage with the managerial discourse. This can lead to the unconscious internalization of ideas and values embedded in the discourse. The performance appraisal also encourages employees to learn the words and adopt the beliefs of managerialism. Employees who capture the entrepreneurial identity are often rewarded with opportunities to grow in the organization. It would be interesting to see, based on the exit surveys, how many employees leave the BC Public Service because they consciously resist the

NPM discourse. It is very possible that many qualified individuals choose not to join the public service for this same reason.

Another opportunity for employees to resist NPM discourse is to enact ways of acting promoted in “Being the Best”, but not fully inculcate its ways of being. What this looks like depends on each individual as it is an internal process. For me, it is about being aware of my values and, as much as possible, acting according to these values. I believe this approach to be a more feasible means of resistance. It can protect the self, at least to some degree, from self-imposed repression and judgement. These sites of resistance may be quite small, yet taken together can represent a significant ideological gap in the organization, where new ideas and representations can infiltrate and take hold, or where traditional ideas can persevere. The weakness of this approach, however, is that there is no formal opportunity to establish a single vision that unites employees against the dominant discourse. A more concrete means to achieve collective resistance might be through the union. The BC Government and Service Employees’ Union (BCGEU) was established to address working conditions of provincial government employees and today continues to negotiate with employers such as the BC Public Service. The values that it promotes dovetail with a more traditional notion of the public service (BC Government and Service Employees’ Union [BCGEU], 2012, Who We Are). However, this would be a difficult struggle to lead. As Maravelias (2003) suggests, the NPM logic is very powerful as it is difficult to resist something that is both undefined and originates from within individuals.

Summary

To better understand contemporary managerial ideas supporting employee engagement initiatives at the BC Public Service, I outlined the development of management thought and

engaged with critical management literature. Then, following Fairclough's (2009) four-step approach, I conducted an interdiscursive analysis of "Being the Best", the BC Public Service's corporate human resource management plans. Table 2 below provides a brief summary of my findings at each stage of analysis. Three themes, consistent with NPM discourse, emerged from the analysis: transformative change, public servant identity, and organizational culture. The practices associated with the managerial strategies as depicted by these themes helped maintain relations of power at the BC Public Service by representing the organization in a state of crisis for which only there is one solution—to transform the culture of the public service and the identity of the public servant so that they conform to neo-liberal values. However, tensions in the texts suggest that the identity and culture captured in "Being the Best" are not exclusive of competing discourses and that traditional public administration values remain important. These ideological overlaps represent opportunities for front line employees to resist the managerial discourse in both individual and collective ways.

In the following chapter, I reflect on my experience conducting this study given that I am a front line employee at the BC Public Service. I think about the assumptions I held at the beginning of the research and consider my current beliefs. I also wonder about an alternate approach to management that has the potential to protect the integrity of employees as well as support the delivery of public services productivity – the ethic of care.

Table 2. Highlights of Findings at Each Stage of Analysis

Stages	Steps at Each Stage	My Approach	My Results
Stage 1	- identify a research topic that relates to a social concern that can, in theory, be addressed - construct the research object by engaging with relevant theory from various disciplines	- the research topic is employee engagement initiatives at the BC Public Service - conduct a historical review of management ideas and explore critical management literature	theories to understand contemporary ideas around employee engagement include administrative management theory, organizational theory and labour process theory
Stage 2	- select one or more relevant texts for analysis - carry out interdiscursive and linguistic analyses of the selected text(s) – identify the dialectical relations between the text and other social elements	- the texts of interest are BC Public Service Human Resource Plans covering the years 2006 to 2010 - search the texts for contemporary management ideas and vocabulary consistent with the literature review - look at how managerialism ideals are represented in the texts through the choice of images, layout, etc.	- three themes emerge from the analysis: transformational change: the context of the BC Public Service is reframed – change is necessary and there is only one ‘right’ way to solve the impending crisis public servant identity: the identity of the public servant is reshaped around the entrepreneurial spirit organizational culture: the BC Public Service culture is redefined to align with managerial values
Stage 3	- consider how the social order needs the social wrong and ask the following questions: - How is ideology helping to maintain particular relations of power and domination? - Is the social wrong inherent to the social order?	- consider how managerial discourse reinforces and strengthens power relations in the workplace - assess the degree to which the intensification of managerial control is inherent to the neo-liberal order	- managerial discourse and practices intensify management control by shifting the responsibility of organizational goals onto the employees and encouraging employees to self-manage through the performance appraisal process - managerial discourse helps maintain relations of power between neo-liberal ideology and the BC Public Service – NPM emphasizes business values and subjects the organization and its employees to appraisal in terms of these values

Stage 4	• look for possibilities within the existing social process for addressing the social wrong – these possibilities appear as gaps and contradictions in the text	• look for conflicting and ambiguous ideas in the texts and consider how these can help address social wrongs	• the notion of the BC public service as a corporation and the public servant as an entrepreneur has not been made to appear completely ‘normal’ or ‘natural’ ○ there is a tension between the goal of efficiency and the value of accountability; the hierarchical structure of the organization requires some level of accountability measures ○ morality of service – the responsibility of government is the provision of common goods despite its use of private sector management practices • possibilities for resistance exist within each employee, who can choose to not fully inculcate the ‘new’ public servant identity • a collective approach to address oppression in the workplace is through the BCGEU
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Chapter Five: Conclusion and Final Thoughts

The purpose of Critical Discourse Analysis is to illuminate the values and assumptions contained within particular texts that help create, maintain, and challenge relations of domination and oppression. By uncovering these common sense notions, it may be possible to address these social wrongs. The goal of this research was to explore the ways in which the BC Public Service human resource plans articulated their management discourse to reshape the identity of the BC public servant. The data source was a series of five human resource plans entitled “Being the Best”, spanning the years 2006 to 2010. After conducting a critical discourse analysis of “Being the Best”, it became evident that values and assumptions associated with the discourse of NPM were woven into and across the texts. The analysis showed that “Being the Best” was consistent with other change management strategies that intensify managerial control. First, the BC Public Service was depicted as an organization in crisis. The only right approach to address this crisis was to transform the public service, so that it would be strong and nimble and more able to keep pace with economic changes. The main targets of this change process were the culture of the organization and the identity of the public servant, which were represented in neo-liberal terms of productivity, competition, and performance. Through the performance appraisal, employees were encouraged to evaluate how well they enacted the proper behaviours and inculcated the ideal public servant characteristics set out in “Being the Best”. The employee appraisal had the effect of transferring managerial control from an external authority to the employees in the form of self-management. NPM discourse helped the organization’s leadership maintain management control and resulted in a stronger alignment between the BC Public Service and the dominant neo-liberal ideology.

This research makes three contributions to academic literature:

Empirically, the research contributes to the dearth of studies undertaken that explicitly examine new management discourses in British Columbia's public sector. It takes a critical look at a specific human resource management strategy at the BC Public Service. It uncovers some of the assumptions that support the strategy's managerial logic and reveals how power relationships between managers and their employees are maintained and intensified through NPM discourse. No other research critically examines "Being the Best".

Professionally, this research contributes to a collective resistance of new managerialism in the workplace. I wrote this research from the standpoint of a public service employee. It provides a front line perspective on human resource management strategies and power relationships at the BC Public Service. This research is, in one sense, unique because employees generally have few opportunities to be critical of management approaches employed by their organizations. There are even fewer occasions for employees to conduct academic research about their workplaces.

Methodologically, this research helps make Critical Discourse Analysis literature more diverse. It contributes to the literature by bringing CDA together with a growing body of work on human resource management policy in the public sector. There is debate within CDA as to how best to go about conducting critical discourse analysis in management and organizational studies (see Leitch & Palmer, 2010 and Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 2010). Although CDA is increasing in popularity among critical analysts interested in management and organizational studies (for example, see Phillips, Sewell, & Jaynes, 2008), the public sector is still not a popular site of inquiry.

An Alternate Approach to Management – The Ethic of Care

Despite the suggestion by NPM advocates that there is no alternative to this market-based management approach, academics and management practitioners have proposed alternative models. For example, McGregor developed Theory Y, which articulated a more positive view of employees. He suggested it was managers' responsibility to support employees and nurture productive relationships. Follett also emphasized the role of managers in providing support to employees and seeking integrated solutions that meet everyone's needs. More recently, Kernaghan suggested that a participative model of management, where leadership is shared and service to the public is emphasized, can be more constructive. He proposed that accountability and innovation are not incompatible values and emphasized the importance of public service as a motivator for public servants. Savoie also emphasized the value of service and accountability. He proposed the notion of shared accountability, given that today's policy decisions often involve many participants.

Another alternative framework for public administration not addressed in the literature review is Burnier's (2003) care ethic. She argues that "within public administration a discourse on care must be developed for the purpose of ensuring that care is considered one of the hallmarks of good government" (Burnier, 2003, p. 530). She proposes the implementation of the care ethic as a means for government to offer better services to the public and argues that government's dependence on "universal categories" has limited its ability to deliver services that address people's particular situations. By applying the virtues of care and compassion, "the civic-minded administrator is able to 'build meaningful and trusting relationships' with citizens and the larger political community" (Burnier, 2003, p. 531).

This same line of reasoning could be applied to the BC Public Service. By adopting an ethic of care, managers could also build meaningful and compassionate relationships with their employees. Such relationships could enable managers to provide employees the freedom to exercise professional judgment and also protect the boundaries of the personal. According to Kurth (2005), a caring relationship is founded on love, trust, and respect; in the organizational context, it involves “leading by serving your followers” (p. 456). The adoption of this philosophy would require managers to reframe the definition of success at work. Rather than measure how well they meet business objectives, they would instead reflect on how well they support their employees. Their responsibilities would not be to cater to executives, but to be at the service of the employees that carry out the work. This approach to management would require a shift in thinking. The morality of capital would be substituted by the ethic of care, and the notion of authority would be replaced with philosophies of nurture, love, and respect. Care would become the new value guiding how people work together. This value would dovetail nicely with the values of public service, shared accountability and shared leadership, as highlighted by McGregor, Follett, Kernaghan, and Savoie. The ethic of care would guide how people live together and make decisions together.

Could an ethic of care ever be implemented in the workplace? At times, it seems rather unlikely given our society’s concern with the pursuit of self-interest (such as seeking increased wages and higher levels authority). However, I believe that a few caring leaders within a community or organization can inspire others to be more nurturing and compassionate. Because the ethic of care is something that is cultivated from within, it does not need to be endorsed by management gurus and organizational leaders to be taken up. Additional research into the ethic of care as a framework for public administration may also help leaders and managers take up this

approach. In the same way that the language of business made its way into the management discourse at the BC Public Service, the lexicon of love, respect, citizenship, and leadership through service can also one day become the dominant management discourse.

Reflections of a Public Servant

This research was challenging for a number of reasons. I work full time in an office-based position and much of my work is done sitting at a desk in front of a computer; therefore, I found it difficult to sit at the computer again on evenings and weekends to write. This research was also a challenge because the topic I selected was about my work. This meant that I thought about work both in the office and at home, making it hard for me to separate myself from the topic. Finally, my research was a challenge because it was critical—it aimed to look behind appearances as presented in “Being the Best” to see the relations of power that generate common sense assumptions at the BC Public Service.

My goal for this research is bring to light the ways in which employee engagement and other management initiatives at the BC Public Service intensify management control. Because my research questions what may seem ‘normal’ or ‘natural’, colleagues and others at work may not immediately appreciate its value or purpose. When I talk to co-workers about my research, most assume that I am looking for ways to increase employee engagement levels at the BC Public Service. If I had conducted a study of the positive and negative effects of telework, or if I had investigated ways to maximize the use of social media in the public service, my research would have more purchase with colleagues, managers, and executives. In choosing to do critical research, I am implicitly challenging management authority, which limits my opportunities to talk about or present my research. To be clear, at no point did anyone at the BC Public Service criticize my work or interfere with my research. In fact, I received funding from the Pacific

Leaders Scholarships for Public Servants program to help cover the cost of tuition. I am very grateful for this funding.

My research topic not only affected the level of interest in the research, but also had an impact on my sense of *self qua self* at work. As a public servant, I had to challenge my own common sense assumptions regarding the organization. I considered the degree to which my work experiences influenced my thoughts about management and asked myself: Would I feel differently if I were a manager? Would I view “Being the Best” in a more positive light if I were an emerging young leader taken under the wing of a manager or executive? What if I were close to retirement? Would I care about these initiatives and the impacts they might have on employees? Continuously questioning the ground on which I stood was at once interesting and unsettling.

The following are some of the assumptions I held about the organization before and while conducting this research. These are based on my experiences and informal observations as an employee of the BC Public Service.

Assumption 1: Front line public servants are a subordinated group. They have little influence or authority except in how they interact with peers and those they serve. Some are ignored while others find themselves under the watchful eye, or gaze, of their managers. Those managers who overlook their employees fail to recognize the importance of embracing employees and being available to provide support. On the other hand, managers who administer every detail and constantly evaluate their staff devalue the abilities of each employee. In both cases, managers misuse their authority and power.

Assumption 2: Managers often make decisions based on their own personal and career interests, rather than the interests of their staff. They dominate their employees because they

think they have a better understanding of the issues from a strategic perspective. This is important to managers who seek approval from executives regardless of the impact on their employees. Other managers ignore their staff because they are too busy catering to executives or building their professional networks across the organization and with stakeholders. Again, managers abuse their authority.

Assumption 3: Employees who best embody the characteristics of the ideal public servant (who are efficient, innovative, and focused on results) receive managerial support to ‘move up the ranks’. These employees enact the right ways of acting and inculcate the correct ways of being.

Assumption 4: Managers and executives exercise their authority under the belief that they have earned this authority. They do not consider that their access to power is due, at least in part, to their already privileged positions in society. A quick glance at any provincial government office confirms that the majority of public servants have white skin (BCPSA, 2006, p. 9; 2008a, p. 25). Aboriginal people, visible minorities, and persons with disabilities are under-represented based on the population of the province and its labour force (BCPSA, 2012, p. 7).

These assumptions are notable because they are not, in my view, very sympathetic toward those who hold official power. Given my thoughts and feelings regarding the current role of management in the workplace, I wonder how it is that I can work in a hierarchical organization. I think what motivates me to work in the public sector is that I value public service and the public servants who chose to do this work. Indeed, it is this passion for service that led me to focus my research on management discourse at the BC Public Service. While many employees, including myself, may have understood on the surface that “Being the Best” was another tool to further control the front lines, without analyzing this critically, we could not fully

understand the reasons why we felt this way. Hopefully, this research brings to light some of the reasons for the discomfort.

After preparing the literature review for this research, I came across a 2007 article by Maravelias that provides an interesting perspective on the notion of freedom in the workplace. I found this article particularly noteworthy because it articulated another reason why I feel frustrated at work. Maravelias (2007) begins his article by pointing to a debate in critical organization studies around whether the shift from bureaucratic to post-bureaucratic management ideas increases or decreases employees' freedom at work. This question comes about because freedom is a key argument for NPM. He maintains that this shift neither increases nor decreases freedom, but instead redefines the meaning of freedom. The traditional notion of freedom is defined as autonomy from external influences—a free individual maintains a certain distance to the world. In modern management thinking, freedom is associated with innovation and flexibility. This new definition of freedom has a significant impact in the workplace because it fosters an uncritical and self-centred approach to work.

Employees in the post-bureaucratic organization are encouraged to seek opportunities and explore their potential at work. The realm of the self is brought in *as a resource*. Employees are asked to “put their heart and soul into work” (Maravelias, 2007, p. 565). The ideal employee in the post-bureaucracy is an unself-conscious opportunist, who bases his or her actions on a willingness to “mould ... into social structures, even if it means rendering the self indistinct” (Maravelias, 2007, p. 559). The workplace becomes a series of opportunities. Freedom is always potential and is never fully achieved.

Maravelias (2007) describes this new conception of freedom in a very insightful way: “The person who is free does not wish to stand at the side of the world, looking at it and

analysing from a distance, but wishes to belong to it in a way that lets him or her move through it like a fish moves through water” (p. 559). This notion of freedom has a lot of appeal as it seems easier and more convenient to be an unself-conscious opportunist.

However, I think you compromise your values and the role you can play in society by moulding your *self* into social structures. Somehow, there has to be a way to fit in, but not give in. This brings me back to why I did this research project in the first place. I wanted to make a positive difference for the people I work with. I think I accomplished this in the sense that my research contributes to a body of work concerned with righting social wrongs. It also makes a positive difference in the sense that it helps inform my own approach to work. Although my circle of influence at work may be small, I intend to apply an ethic of care to my work. At the very least, this will counteract the cynicism that comes with the realization that the water we swim in is not a vast sea, but a socially-constructed fish bowl.

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