

ROUTLEDGE RESEARCH IN EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS

# Foucault, Governmentality, and Organization

Inside the Factory of the Future

Alan McKinlay and Philip Taylor



# Foucault, Governmentality, and Organization

Michael Foucault's idea of 'governmentality' asks us to look at ways that powerful groups imagine their authority and how this informs specific genres of knowledge. Using Foucault's philosophy as a lens through which to interpret radical managerial innovation, this book traces how abstract managerial ideas about maximizing production flexibility and employee freedom were translated into concrete, day-to-day practices at the Motorola plant in Easter Inch, UK. Using eyewitness accounts, the book describes how employees dealt with the increased freedom Motorola promoted amongst its employees, how employees adapted to managerial changes, specifically the elimination of large-scale management, and where the 'managerless' system came under strain. A fascinating case study of the benefits and caveats of 'the factory of the future,' this book is essential reading for researchers, graduate students, and undergraduates interested in the areas of management studies, human resource management, and organizational studies, among others.

**Alan McKinlay** is Professor of Human Resource Management, Newcastle University Business School, UK. He has written extensively about long-run developments in industrial relations and work organization. He has contributed to journals such as *Business History* and *Organization*, among others. His most recent edited book is *Creative Labour Working in the Creative Industries*, with Chris Smith, which has gone into a second edition.

**Philip Taylor** is Professor of Human Resource Management at Strathclyde University, UK. He is a world-leading expert on management strategy and work organization in call centres. He has written articles for the *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *Industrial Relations Journal*, *Human Relations*, *New Technology*, and *Work and Employment* journals. He was the coauthor of *The Meaning of Work in the New Economy* and coedited *Future of Worker Representation*.

## **Routledge Research in Employment Relations**

*For a full list of titles in this series, please visit [www.routledge.com](http://www.routledge.com)*

**Series editors: Rick Delbridge and Edmund Heery**

***Cardiff Business School, UK***

Aspects of the employment relationship are central to numerous courses at both the undergraduate and the postgraduate levels.

Drawing on insights from industrial relations, human resource management, and industrial sociology, this series provides an alternative source of research-based materials and texts, reviewing key developments in employment research.

Books published in this series are works of high academic merit, drawn from a wide range of academic studies in the social sciences.

**8 New Unions, New Workplaces**

A Study of Union Resilience  
in the Restructured  
Workplace

*Andy Danford, Mike Richardson,  
and Martin Upchurch*

**9 Partnership and Modernisation  
in Employment Relations**

*Edited by Mark Stuart and Miguel  
Martinez Lucio*

**10 Partnership at Work**

The quest for radical organiza-  
tional change

*William K. Roche and John F.  
Geary*

**11 European Works Councils**

Pessimism of the intellect opti-  
mism of the will?

*Edited by Ian Fitzgerald and John  
Stirling*

**12 Employment Relations in Non-  
Union Firms**

*Tony Dundon and Derek Rollinson*

**13 Management, Labour Process  
and Software Development**

Reality bytes

*Edited by Rowena Barrett*

**14 A Comparison of the Trade  
Union Merger Process in Britain  
and Germany**

Joining Forces?

*Jeremy Waddington, Marcus  
Kahmann and Jürgen Hoffmann*

**15 French Industrial Relations in  
the New World Economy**

*Nick Parsons*

**16 Union Recognition**

Organising and bargaining outcomes

*Edited by Gregor Gall*

- 17 Towards a European Labour Identity**  
The Case of the European Work Council  
*Edited by Michael Whittall, Herman Knudsen and Fred Huijgen*
- 18 Power at Work**  
How Employees Reproduce the Corporate Machine  
*Darren McCabe*
- 19 Management in the Airline Industry**  
*Geraint Harvey*
- 20 Trade Unions in a Neoliberal World**  
British Trade Unions under New Labour  
*Gary Daniels and John McIlroy*
- 21 Diversity Management in the UK**  
Organizational and Stakeholder Experiences  
*Anne-marie Greene and Gill Kirton*
- 22 Ethical Socialism and the Trade Unions**  
Allan Flanders and British Industrial Relation Reform  
*John Kelly*
- 23 European Works Councils**  
A Transnational Industrial Relations Institution in the Making  
*Jeremy Waddington*
- 24 The Politics of Industrial Relations**  
Labor Unions in Spain  
*Kerstin Hamann*
- 25 Social Failures of EU Enlargement**  
A Case of Workers Voting with their Feet  
*Guglielmo Meardi*
- 26 Trade Unions and Workplace Training**  
Issues and International Perspectives  
*Edited by Richard Cooney and Mark Stuart*
- 27 Men, Wage Work and Family**  
*Edited by Paula McDonald and Emma Jeanes*
- 28 Gendering and Diversifying Trade Union Leadership**  
*Edited by Sue Ledwith and Lise Lotte Hansen*
- 29 Gender and Leadership in Trade Unions**  
*Gill Kirton and Geraldine Healy*
- 30 Minimum Wages, Pay Equity, and Comparative Industrial Relations**  
*Edited by Damian Grimshaw*
- 31 The Transformation of Employment Relations in Europe**  
Institutions and Outcomes in the Age of Globalization  
*Edited by James Arrowsmith and Valeria Pulignano*
- 32 Financial Services Partnerships**  
Labor-Management Dynamics  
*Peter J. Samuel*

*Page Intentionally Left Blank*

# **Foucault, Governmentality, and Organization**

Inside the Factory of the Future

**Alan McKinlay and Philip Taylor**

First published 2014  
by Routledge  
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

and by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

© 2014 Alan McKinlay and Philip Taylor

The right of Alan McKinlay and Philip Taylor to be identified as authors of this work has been asserted by them in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilized in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

**Trademark Notice:** Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

McKinlay, Alan, 1957–

Foucault, governmentality, and organization : inside the factory of the future / by Alan McKinlay and Philip Taylor.

pages cm. — (Routledge research in employment relations ; 7)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Motorola Semiconductor Products Inc.—Management—Case studies.
2. Management—Employee participation. 3. Organizational change.
4. Industrial relations. 5. Foucault, Michel, 1926–1984.

I. Title.

HD9696.S44M676 2014

331.2—dc23

2013038665

ISBN: 978-0-415-74905-3 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-79634-5 (ebk)

Typeset in Sabon  
by Apex CoVantage, LLC

# Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
1 The Will to Empower: Governing the Workplace	1
2 Working for the Yankee Dollar	27
3 Greenfield Site, Greenfield Labour?	53
4 'Not Just Another Number': Empowerment, Discipline, and Teamworking Freedom	80
5 Confession, Discipline, and Freedom	102
6 'Just Like Any Other Factory'	128
<i>Bibliography and Other Resources</i>	157
<i>Index</i>	167



*Page Intentionally Left Blank*

# Acknowledgements

We have incurred many debts in researching and writing this book. Our special thanks to the people of Motorola, Easter Inch, who welcomed us into their lives. We hope that we have captured something of their experience of the hope, exhilaration, and frustration of their working lives. The project would not have been possible without the support of Mike Hickes and John Brannigan. Fiona Gifford and Gwyn Pugh provided enormous insights into the philosophy and practices of teamworking in Easter Inch. Robert Henderson offered thoughtful and provocative reflections on the experience of imagining, realizing, and being part of the ‘factory of the future.’ John Boyle provided invaluable help with some of the interviews of former staff of Motorola, East Kilbride. Chris Carter, Patricia Findlay, Bill Knox, Alistair Mutch, and Michael Rowlinson were exemplary colleagues and friends. Tony Slaven, the founding director of the Centre for Business History in Scotland, was supportive of an unconventional attempt to historicise contemporary business practice. Finally, we gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Leverhulme Trust.

*Page Intentionally Left Blank*

# 1 The Will to Empower

## Governing the Workplace

### INTRODUCTION

If one question runs through Michel Foucault's work, it is how do we govern ourselves and govern others? Foucault addresses this question through historical research into the development of forms of knowledge and practices of power that treat people as both the subject and object of scrutiny. This discursive innovation, coupled with a whole series of institutional practices, results in the construction of a 'subject' to be known, that is, a process of knowing that necessarily objectifies the subject. This insistence on the cultural and historical specificity of the changing nature of the subject registers, for Foucault, the untenability of any humanistic argument predicated upon some notion of a universal, transhistorical subject. No longer can particular attitudes or acts be ascribed convincingly to some universal human nature. The complex, often paradoxical, interplay between discipline and freedom forms the terrains within which we live our modern lives. This is the subject of the chapter's opening section. Discipline has an obvious double meaning that is seldom taken seriously by commentators. First, and by far the most common reading, is that discipline refers to practices and places of constraint and correction. A second meaning of discipline, of course, is a body of knowledge tied to practices, but this sense is much less favoured by acolytes and critics alike. In Foucault's double sense, expertise is disciplinary to the extent that an individual or group's behaviour can be predicted or retrospectively interpreted in terms of how closely it matches a specific category or identity. Writing of the role of expert testimony in criminal proceedings, Foucault makes observations that might serve as a useful general guide. Expert testimony aims 'to show how the individual already resembles his crime before he has committed it.' Thus the expert provides 'proof of a form of conduct, a character, and an attitude that are moral defects while being neither, pathologically, illnesses nor, legally, offenses.'<sup>1</sup> All sorts of prior behaviours are invested with a cumulative meaning and become symptoms of abnormality. Nor is this an end of the matter. Foucault is equally insistent that subjects are not constructed exclusively by authoritative disciplines but also construct themselves through and against these

## 2 Foucault, Governmentality, and Organization

dominant discourses. Individuals construct their own identities by their interpretation and embodiment of some version of the dominant discourse. Identity is a process of both institutional or social construction and individual action. The point of such expertise, as Jeffrey Nealon points out, is not to devise a singular, central binary that distinguishes between the normal and the abnormal. Power gains most when it is applied most widely and in great detail: 'Foucaultian . . . norms do not primarily work to *exclude* the abnormal; rather, they work ceaselessly to account for it as such—to render it as normal or abnormal—and in addition to link it with the murky, amorphous category of life or lifestyle.'<sup>2</sup> Identifying the deviant is a prelude to the proliferation of analytical categories and reformative practices that produces—multiplies—the number of identities available to subjects, rather than reducing them to a simple normal/abnormal distinction. Of course, this proliferation is a precondition to the efficient and continuous measurement and calculation that so effectively make and legitimise expert knowledge. Here Foucault is suggesting that what is needed to understand the rise of neoliberalism is not so much a political economy as a political statistic.

Discipline should be efficient, or at least justified in terms of efficiency and in forms that provoke as little resistance as possible.<sup>3</sup> This is best achieved through targeting impersonal actions or behaviours rather than specific types of individuals, particularly when the unstated objective is to reform precisely those individuals. The most effective forms of disciplines, then, are those that are not explicitly prohibitive or punitive but that foreground their productive, *positive* objectives. Here the effectiveness of a disciplinary practice is that it minimises, if not avoids, resistance with all its attendant uncertainties. We will elaborate on this in the second section, which outlines the development of Foucault's concept of governmentality. Disciplinary power seeks to be imperceptible and unremarkable. The exercise of power and control becomes a dull routine, all the more effective when those subjected to it are scarcely aware of its operation. Further, disciplinary power works most effectively through administrative routines from which the administered perceive some benefit from compliance. How we might approach an example of the processes of translation of corporate ideals into the routines of the so-called factory of the future is considered in the final section.

## GOVERNING THE WORKPLACE

Governmentality has proved to be perhaps Foucault's most productive concept. Governmentalist studies have spread across the social sciences and the humanities. Yet 'governmentality' was not a neologism coined by Foucault. Rather, it was a term invented by Roland Barthes in 1957 to capture the technocratic drift of French politics that reduced issues of government to questions of efficiency, at least rhetorically. The most profound political act, following Barthes, is to neutralise questions of power as technocratic

administrative issues, nothing more. This takes issues of, for instance, power or poverty out of public debate and defines them as primarily administrative, not political, matters. This depoliticisation radically circumscribed public awareness and debate. For Barthes, this slippage of social transformation to public administration was so obvious that governmentality—a term he thought useful, if clumsy, even ‘barbarous’—required little further elaboration. Foucault was introduced to the term during the late 1950s and early 1960s when he and Barthes were part of the circle of the newly formed *Tel Quel*, a journal that blurred the boundaries between literature, philosophy, and psychoanalysis, and of the more established political and theoretical journal *Critique*.<sup>4</sup> In an important sense, Foucault did not just borrow—somewhat apologetically—the term ‘governmentality’ from Barthes but problematised the ways in which government depoliticised what were inherently political issues, from welfare, to economic performance, to security. What should be studied was not the presentation of ideologies but the *practices* of government. Here, of course, Foucault goes beyond Barthes’s original term. One of Foucault’s closest friends and colleagues, Paul Veyne, observes that this approach involved an abiding concern with what people actually did.<sup>5</sup> Foucault did not search for underlying causes or the hidden agency of society or history. Indeed, Foucault can be usefully interpreted as a very knowing empiricist determined to understand how taken-for-granted facts and practices came about and were, in their turn, dislodged by other, no less compelling, eternal verities. The mechanisms that depoliticised welfare—or rather defined it as a moral failing of individuals to be contained by the state—were critical, not just the efficiency of such state interventions.<sup>6</sup> Methodologically, Foucault directs us to study those technologies that produce populations to be managed and specific forms of individuality, rather than the state or institutions per se. Crucially, however, this does not mean that the state is of no consequence. The state, particularly in neoliberalism, argues Foucault, plays an increasingly strategic role not as the source of governmental powers, but as the regulator of their manifold conditions of existence. The defining motif of contemporary political strategy is calculation, not transformation.

Foucault outlined what he meant by governmentality in a series of lectures at the Collège de France in 1978 and 1979. These lectures chronologically and intellectually bridged his research on disciplinary techniques and his final research on the emergence of modern subjectivities in the *History of Sexuality*. We should be cautious in talking about bridges between different parts of Foucault’s work because it suggests—much too emphatically—two quite different territories, the earlier ‘disciplinary’ Foucault and a later concern for ethics and subjectivities that can be misread as a rejection of his own previous work on prisons, hospitals, and asylums.<sup>7</sup> There is, however, little doubt that these lectures were vital in the development of Foucault’s thinking. There was, however, no wavering in his lifelong concentration on understanding the unfolding of power as a political, legal, and social

#### 4 Foucault, Governmentality, and Organization

concept as well as its specific formations. Equally, in no sense do the lectures involve a rejection of his work on discipline, surveillance, and the individual.<sup>8</sup> Rather, just as disciplinary power did not replace sovereign power so much as supplement it, so governmentality—with its focus on populations—signals the addition of another distinctive mode of power. Similarly, Foucault remained certain that power should not be identified with the state, a certainty expressed in his famous dictum that cutting off the king's head—or thinking beyond the state—was theoretically essential. No less important, this theoretical manoeuvre was necessary to the development of progressive social movements that did not assume that capturing the state was sufficient for progressive, far less revolutionary politics.

In the Collège de France lectures, Foucault observes that his refusal to make governmentality synonymous with the state reflects the much broader meaning of government that was current until the eighteenth century. His inference is clear enough: this broader, archaic meaning of government needs to be revived in order to understand contemporary forms of rule and order. Foucault's 1978–79 lectures were not just based on the resurrection of archaic notions of the so-called arts of government but were also, of course, rooted in contemporary shifts in liberalism, precisely the rise of neoliberalism. From the eighteenth century, Foucault suggests, governmentality has involved some combination of political and pastoral powers. By political power, Foucault was referring to the familiar freedoms of Western democracies: universal suffrage, common rights, a legal system independent of the executive. Pastoral power, on the other hand, is less familiar as a *political* concept: a form of power that compels individuals to become individuals through producing truth about themselves. The archetypal form of pastoral power is a confession that allows—or rather, forces—individuals to develop their individuality through the contemplation of their public behaviour and private thoughts. All of this is couched in a pastoral system in which the individual receives consolation, guidance, and protection from the pastor. In its secularised form, pastoral power becomes the ways in which the modern state produces the conditions necessary for the free, liberal individual by assuming responsibility for the security and well-being of the population.<sup>9</sup> Here Foucault uses the term 'conduct of conduct' to capture the interplay between those performative technologies that prescribe behaviours and those that encourage self-control.

I think that if one wants to analyse the genealogy of the subject in Western civilization, he has to take into account not only techniques of domination but also techniques of the self. Let's say: he has to take into account the interaction between those two types of techniques—techniques of domination and techniques of the self. Neither is reducible to the other; and neither can be understood solely in its own terms. He has to take into account the points where the technologies of domination of individuals over one another have recourse to processes by

which the individual acts upon himself. And conversely, he has to take into account the points where the techniques of the self are integrated into structures of coercion and domination. The contact point, where the individuals are driven by others is tied to the way they conduct themselves, is what we call government. Governing people, in the broad sense of the word, is not a way to force people to do what the governor wants; it is always a versatile equilibrium, with complementarity and conflicts between techniques which assure coercion and processes through which the self is constructed or modified by himself.<sup>10</sup>

When Foucault speaks of technologies, he means this in the broadest sense—all those social, organisational, mechanical, and digital ways that shape individuals' behaviours and attitudes and within and against which individuals make themselves. Technologies are not simply a reflection of preexisting social relations, nor an expression of power. Technologies of power are, rather, the variety of mechanisms that constitute social relations, that create specific forms of individual and populations to be variously freed, empowered, rehabilitated, and so on. Technologies, for Foucault, are specific to institutions and particular projects that seek to understand some aspect of the social—a population—and to remake individuals in some way. It is this inescapable *combination* of a political rationality *and* a technology that defines a governmentalist project.

Foucault had a peculiarly ambivalent relationship to political theory. On the one hand, he was dismissive of general theories of power or the state while, on the other hand, prepared to develop his argument through an engagement with, amongst many others, Bentham, Machiavelli and Marx. Specifically, Foucault was responding to the theoretical and political choices of the mid-seventies. Theoretically, he rejected any notion that the operation of the state was reducible to the logic of capital or that the development of the modern state involved a long process of functional accretion.<sup>11</sup> Politically, his was also an implicit rejection of any Leninist political strategy that hinged on the capture of the state. Despite his many speeches, interviews, and commentaries on contemporary politics, Foucault rarely allowed himself to be drawn into debate with political opponents or theoretical critics, always preferring to develop his own research agenda rather than respond to others. In his Collège de France lectures through the mid-1970s, Foucault preferred to offer an oblique commentary on emerging neoliberal thought and policy via meditations on marginal philosophers and long forgotten statesmen. Of course, Foucault was acutely aware that this reluctance to engage directly with contemporary theorists tended to fragment and obscure his argument.

This readiness to use the lectures as a conceptual proving ground gives them a provisional feel that has stimulated an explosion of interest in the unfinished business of governmentality. However, we can surely read Barthes's original meaning of governmentality as evaluating the state—as well



as politics—in terms of its efficiency and efficacy as a constant theme in Foucault's theoretical development and in his own political activism.

Consider Foucault's reading of Machiavelli. Machiavelli is important for Foucault not so much for his advice on political strategy as for what that advice signified in terms of who had access to political knowledge. In other words, Machiavelli represents the separation of 'the arts of government' from the person of the prince. Machiavelli's advice may have been intended for the Prince's ears only, but, once printed, it became *public* knowledge, a way for others to judge the validity, integrity, and wisdom of royal strategy. Statecraft becomes not private counsel but, at least in principle, replicable in other domains. Foucault spoke often of the analytical need to cut off the king's head, to accept that the modern state is not the source or even a privileged place of power. Analogously, this is suggested by the relationship between the prince and his adviser. Over time, the arts of government became a form of expert knowledge. Just as the arts of government become separate from the body of the prince, so the ways in which state efficiency is judged emerge as part of the rise of liberalism and then the common sense of all kinds of institutions. Classical liberalism, for Foucault, has a double focus: on the one hand, maximising the liberty of the individual and, on the other, constantly assessing the legitimacy and efficiency of government in terms of whether its reach is unjustifiably extended. Just as the state is the guarantor of individual liberty, so it is always suspect. Utility is a *suspicious* principle that evaluates and also limits the will to govern: 'the utility of the individual and the general utility will be the major criteria for working out the limits of public authorities and the formations of a form of public law and administrative law.'<sup>12</sup> The state's mission to maximise the public welfare must be matched with a frugality driven by the search not just for efficiency but also for safeguarding the liberty of the individual citizen. Or, as Patrick Joyce put it in his *The Rule of Freedom*, 'In liberalism rule is ceded to a self that must constantly monitor the very civil society and political power that are at once the guarantee of freedom and its threat.'<sup>13</sup> The liberal state can *only* fail when confronted with this impossible task of reconciling the need to reduce its scope while extending its responsibilities. It is much better for the state to adopt strategies that seek to increase its effectiveness by influencing individuals to behave in ways that improve the welfare of the population. The state need not legitimise this strategic reliance upon civil society and individuals only in terms of efficiency. Rather, this shift towards neoliberal governmentality is justified as a way of expanding freedom beyond the state. Neoliberal governmentality is inherent in classical liberalism. Liberal governmentality cannot be exclusively defined from the perspective of the state because 'civil society' codefines the limits of the liberal state.<sup>14</sup> The main advantage of governmentality is that it problematizes classical liberalism's double distinction between the state and civil society, on the one hand, and between the individual and power, on the other. So the ways that the 'state' and 'civil society' are defined are no longer a natural distinction but

one based on specific governmentalist projects. In the factory, the corollary is that the redrawing of the legitimate responsibilities of management, team, and individual becomes neither technocratic nor natural but a reordering of power and knowledge. This process of representation is neither a return to a so-called natural state nor simply a strategic choice but rather part of a governmentalist project that cannot be understood with reference only to specific decision makers or even to an individual firm.

The translation of governmentalist logics across domains is a highly contingent, iterative, and reciprocal process. And, of course, this entails innumerable labour processes: the formulation of categories; the identification of contradictions, ambiguities, and uncertainties; and the refinement and extension of categories. In turn, this demands administrative labour: the design of forms that capture and code data that creates populations and individuals. Data has to be coded, ordered, filed, enumerated, and analysed to identify what problems are to be managed, if not how, and then to clean, refine, and perhaps rethink the data and its categorical composition. All of this work—administrative, intellectual, but above all *material*—is essential to a system of governmentality. The development of population technologies was paralleled first by a move to probabilistic statistics. No less important were prosaic innovations in office technology—from ledgers to horizontal filing systems—capable of handling, categorizing, and sorting massive increases in administrative data.<sup>15</sup> Second, the development of population technologies was paralleled by a flurry of ways of securing individual identities: passports, fingerprints, phrenology. So, for Foucault, the prison was no longer the only or even the most important site of rehabilitation. From the mid-nineteenth century, prisoners could start in solitary confinement and, through good behaviour, progress through stages of less austere cells and prisons until achieving a moral level that merited a form of probation. All of these stages of moral improvement centred on the capacity of the individual for self-surveillance as a necessary prelude to self-improvement. All of these factors were calculable and were central to the statistical formation of the social sciences.<sup>16</sup> From the first, British social science was a social arithmetic of populations and a moral calculus of individuals.

The definition and representation of a territory to be governed, a problem to be managed, is a political process. Paradoxically, the legitimacy and reach of this political process are greatest when presented as an uncontested ‘fact’ to be administered. Governmentality suggests not just a flattening of public debate but that, paradoxically, this depoliticisation is hidden in plain sight. Now, it is not that the territory or problem does not necessarily exist prior to—or independently of—this process of representation. Rather, Foucault is simply pointing out that there is not—and never can be—a simple one-to-one identity of the real and the representation. Moreover, it is the *representation* that matters in terms of the unfolding of a governmentalist project. Or, as Barbara Townley puts it, ‘before a domain can be governed