



Deconstruction And Simulacra: A Postmodern Critique Of Management Science

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Abstract: This study analyzes management science and organizational practice through the lens of postmodernism, employing Derrida's deconstruction and Baudrillard's theory of simulacra to unpack the discursive structures and representational functions within contemporary management. Situated within the framework of Critical Management Studies (CMS), this research addresses the risk of stagnation and "formulaic radicalism" in contemporary critical scholarship, highlighting the need for more specific and nuanced analytical approaches. Consequently, the study aims to apply postmodern conceptual tools to deconstruct managerial discourse and practices. The proposed methodology is a qualitative-theoretical analysis, utilizing Jacques Derrida's deconstruction to dismantle internal logical structures and Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulacra to analyze external representational functions. The deconstructive analysis reveals that central concepts, such as leadership, are constructed upon unstable and hierarchical binary oppositions (e.g., Leader/Follower). Concurrently, the analysis of simulacra demonstrates that practices like Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) often function as pure simulacra within a managerial hyperreality, where image supersedes substance. A synthesis of these findings suggests that managerial discourse is not a neutral reflection of reality but a productive force that actively constructs reality to serve specific power relations. This study contributes to CMS by offering a more nuanced postmodern analytical model. It also positions critique as a Foucauldian intervention, opening possibilities for more ethical, reflective, and emancipatory management practices.

Keywords: Postmodernism, Deconstruction, Simulacra, Management Science, Critical Management Studies (CMS).

INTRODUCTION

This study investigates management science and organizational practice, particularly the fundamental assumptions rooted in the technocratic and positivist paradigm of modernism. This paradigm, which prioritizes instrumental rationality and efficiency, has become the dominant discourse shaping contemporary business schools and corporate practices. In response, an interdisciplinary field known as Critical Management Studies (CMS) has emerged, offering various theoretical alternatives aimed at radically questioning and transforming management practices (Taskin & Willmott, 2008). At the core of CMS lies a profound skepticism towards the



moral, social, and ecological sustainability of current management conceptions and forms. It focuses on how organizations often become instruments of domination and exploitation within broader systems such as capitalism, patriarchy, and neo-imperialism (Adler et al., 2007).

To analyze this object of study, scholars within the CMS tradition have employed a variety of methods and theoretical approaches that can be grouped into several intellectual waves. The first wave, rooted in Labour Process Theory (LPT), extensively used Marxist analysis to uncover structural exploitation and control processes in the workplace (Spicer & Alvesson, 2025). The strength of this method lies in its focus on material and economic conditions; however, it has been criticized for its tendency to overlook the role of subjectivity and individual agency (Adler, 2007). A subsequent wave was influenced by Frankfurt School Critical Theory, which critiqued instrumental rationality and technocracy (Scherer, 2009). Furthermore, post-structuralist approaches, particularly those inspired by Foucault, have become highly influential, focusing on discourse analysis and the mechanisms of power/knowledge (Barratt, 2004). While this approach excels at analyzing subtler forms of power, it is often criticized for its potential for relativism and its neglect of macroeconomic structures (Fournier & Grey, 2000).

The research problem addressed in this article stems from an internal critique of the current state of CMS. Several recent reviews suggest that the field, despite its rapid growth, risks stagnation, becoming “stale, focused on the usual suspects, and predictable.” Spicer and Alvesson (2025) identify several problematic tendencies, such as “formulaic radicalism,” “usual-suspectism,” and “authoritarianism.” Consequently, much critical research merely repeats a general rejection of management without providing fresh and detailed analysis. This gap highlights a need for the application of more specific and in-depth critical tools capable of moving beyond generic critique to demonstrate concretely how managerial discourse and practice can be deconstructed.

Although CMS has developed significantly in the Western world, critical research employing a postmodern approach remains scarce and unsystematic, especially within the Asian or Indonesian context. This study fills this gap by systematically applying a postmodern approach to analyze management science, utilizing two primary conceptual tools: Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction and Jean Baudrillard’s theory of simulacra. This approach is expected to broaden the horizons of CMS by demonstrating how managerial discourse and practices can be dismantled through an analysis



of the internal meaning structures and external representations that constitute contemporary organizational reality.

To address this problem, this article proposes a focused theoretical-analytical approach using two key conceptual tools from the postmodern tradition: deconstruction from Jacques Derrida and the theory of simulacra from Jean Baudrillard. Deconstruction will be employed as a critical reading strategy to dismantle the binary oppositions (e.g., leader/follower, center/periphery, rational/emotional) that tacitly structure and legitimize hierarchies in management theory and practice (A. M. & Ridho, 2024). Meanwhile, the theory of simulacra will be applied to analyze how contemporary management practices, especially those related to image, branding, and corporate social responsibility (CSR), increasingly operate within a “hyperreality,” where signs and representations become more significant than substantive reality itself (Pesqueux, 2022).

This research is expected to make several significant contributions to the development of Critical Management Studies. First, theoretically, this article presents a detailed demonstration of how two powerful postmodern tools can be systematically applied to management science, thereby offering a more nuanced and less formulaic analytical model that responds to the critique of “formulaic radicalism” (Spicer & Alvesson, 2025). Second, methodologically, it provides a framework for other researchers interested in using deconstruction and simulation analysis as a lens to examine organizational phenomena. Third, in line with debates on “engaged scholarship” within CMS (King & Learmonth, 2015; Manning, 2024; Wickert & Schaefer, 2015), the analysis presented here serves as a form of Foucauldian critical intervention. Its goal is not to offer ready-made managerial solutions but to problematize established assumptions, creating a productive paralysis that opens up space for radical alternative thinking (Barratt, 2004; King & Learmonth, 2015).

To achieve these objectives, this article is structured in five sections. Following this introduction, the second section presents a comprehensive literature review on the genealogy and core tenets of CMS, the theoretical pillars of postmodernism, and contemporary debates within the field. The third section elaborates the deconstructive analysis of key concepts in management science, focusing on dismantling binary oppositions. The fourth section applies the theory of simulacra to analyze how modern management practices often operate in a hyperreality dominated



by images. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the main findings and discusses their implications for the future of a more critical and reflective study and practice of management.al

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach within a critical hermeneutic framework, which aims to interpret and deconstruct the meanings and hidden assumptions behind the texts and practices of management science. The critical hermeneutic approach was chosen for its capacity to explore the latent meanings within managerial texts and practices, aligning with the deconstructive goal of this research. Given the theoretical and conceptual nature of this study, the method does not focus on empirical data collection for generalization but rather on in-depth discourse analysis and conceptualization. The two primary methods proposed are Deconstructive Analysis, inspired by Jacques Derrida, and Simulacra Analysis, inspired by Jean Baudrillard. The combination of these two methods facilitates a multi-layered critique of management science, examining both its internal logical structures and its external representations within the context of contemporary society.

Research Stages

The research process will be conducted through three primary. These stages are (1) Identification of the Object of Analysis, (2) Application of Theoretical Lenses, and (3) Synthesis and Critical Reinterpretation.

Stage 1: Identification of the Object of Analysis

The first step is to select and map the central concepts within management science that will be the objects of analysis. These concepts are the theoretical pillars often taken for granted in managerial discourse, such as "Leadership," "Strategy," "Organizational Culture," and "Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)." These concepts will be treated as "texts" in the Derridean sense structures of signifiers whose meanings are unstable and open to deconstruction.

Stage 2: Gradual Application of Theoretical Lenses

Once the objects of analysis are identified, two theoretical lenses will be applied sequentially to dissect them.



Step 2a: Deconstructive Analysis

Deconstructive analysis aims to destabilize the seemingly stable meanings of management concepts by dismantling their underlying logical structures. The steps are as follows:

1. **Identification of Binary Oppositions:** Identifying the opposing conceptual pairs (binary oppositions) that structure the object of analysis. Examples include: Leader/Follower, Rational/Emotional, Center/Periphery, Man/Woman, Strategy/Implementation.
2. **Analysis of Hierarchy:** Examining how one term in the binary opposition is always positioned as superior or primary (privileged) over the other.
3. **Inversion and Subversion:** Conceptually, the hierarchy is inverted to demonstrate that the term considered secondary actually plays a constitutive role in relation to the primary term. The goal is not to create a new hierarchy but to reveal the arbitrary nature of the original hierarchy and to open up possibilities for new, previously marginalized meanings.

This deconstructive process can be represented schematically as follows:

Given a binary opposition: (A/B) where $A > B$ (A is superior to B)

Step 1 (Inversion): To show that B can be positioned as superior $\rightarrow B > A$

Step 2 (Subversion): To destabilize the opposition itself to generate a new understanding $\rightarrow C$
(where C is a new framework that transcends A and B)

Step 2b: Analysis of Simulacra and Hyperreality

This analysis focuses on the relationship between the representation (image) of a management concept and the practical reality it purports to describe. The objective is to identify the extent to which management discourse has shifted from representing reality to creating its own reality (hyperreality). This analysis follows the four stages of the evolution of the sign as conceived by Baudrillard:

1. **The Sign as a Reflection of Reality:** Examining whether the image (e.g., a CSR advertisement) is an accurate reflection of actual practice.
2. **The Sign as a Mask of Reality:** Examining whether the image masks or distorts a contradictory reality (e.g., an "eco-friendly" image masking polluting practices).
3. **The Sign as a Mask for the Absence of Reality:** Examining whether the image conceals the fact that there is no substantive reality behind it (e.g., a claim of an "innovative culture" with no innovative practices whatsoever).



4. The Sign as a Pure Simulacrum: Analyzing whether the image has become a reality in itself, no longer having any relation to a real-world referent other than to other images (hyperreality).

This process of the evolution of the sign toward simulation can be schematized as follows:

S 1→R (The Sign [S] reflects Reality [R])

S 2↔R (The Sign masks and distorts Reality)

S 3→¬R (The Sign masks the absence of Reality)

S 4 ↔S '(The Sign has no reference to Reality, only to other signs [S'])

Stage 3: Synthesis and Critical Reinterpretation

The final stage is to synthesize the insights gained from the deconstructive and simulacra analyses. The findings from the deconstruction (an understanding of internal contradictions and semantic instability) will be combined with the findings from the simulacra analysis (an understanding of how images function ideologically). This synthesis will yield a comprehensive critical reinterpretation of the analyzed management concept, highlighting its power relations, hidden biases, and ideological functions in the context of contemporary organizations.

This chapter constitutes the core of the research, where the conceptual tools outlined in the literature review are applied to analyze management science. In line with the Critical Management Studies (CMS) framework, this analysis aims to “denaturalize” concepts that have long been considered established, reveal hidden power relations, and question their underlying assumptions (Fournier & Grey, 2000). A recent study by Spicer and Alvesson (2025) indicates that CMS has evolved to a point that highlights the limitations of a critique focused solely on negation and simple criticism. Spicer underscores the need for more diverse and critical approaches that not only target the “usual suspects” in organizational critique but also develop a more constructive and reflective agenda regarding managerial power and ideology (Spicer & Alvesson, 2025). This analysis will be executed through the three established methodological stages:

1. Identification of the Object of Analysis,
2. Application of Theoretical Lenses, and
3. Synthesis and Critical Reinterpretation.



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Stage 1: Identification of the Object of Analysis

The first step in this critical analysis is to identify and map the discursive objects within management science that will be dissected. These objects are not merely technical concepts but are "texts" in the broad Derridean sense that is, as structures of signifiers laden with often invisible ideological assumptions and power relations (A.M. & Ridho, 2024). Derrida's deconstructive approach broadens this understanding by emphasizing a way to dismantle binary oppositions and open up space for fluid and plural meanings (Sikirivwa, 2015). Within the CMS framework, managerial concepts are viewed as social constructs that need to be questioned, rather than as neutral representations of reality (Adler, Forbes, & Willmott, 2007).

Based on this premise, this study selects two main sets of analytical objects that are central to contemporary management discourse:

1. **The Concept of Leadership:** Specifically, the model of transformational leadership is chosen as the object for deconstructive analysis. The rationale is that modern leadership discourse has become one of the strongest ideological pillars in organizations, actively shaping subjectivities and naturalizing hierarchies (Spicer & Alvesson, 2025). Learmonth et al. (2017) also emphasize that leadership is a relational process fraught with power contradictions, thus requiring critical analysis to examine the complexity of the leader-follower relationship within that context (Learmonth, Arambewela, & Ewing, 2017).
2. **Organizational Representation Practices:** This includes Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Corporate Values. This object was chosen for analysis through the lens of simulacra because both are highly prominent communication and branding practices in the contemporary era, where image and public perception often become more important than operational substance (Pesqueux, 2022). Hanlon and Fleming (2024) show that CSR is part of a neoliberal mechanism for shaping corporate legitimacy that shifts focus from collective regulation to individual symbolic solutions (Hanlon & Fleming, 2024).

Stage 2: Application of Theoretical Lenses

Once the objects of analysis were established, the two primary theoretical lenses deconstruction and simulacra were applied separately to deconstruct each object.



Deconstructive Analysis: Dismantling Hierarchy in the Concept of Leadership

Deconstructive analysis aims to destabilize the seemingly stable meaning of the leadership concept by dismantling its underlying logical structure. Furthermore, deconstruction theory opens up space for understanding leadership as a dialectical process that is fluid and contextual (Sikirivwa, 2015; Learmonth et al., 2017).

In mainstream management literature, this relationship can be seen explicitly. Robbins and Judge (2022) define leadership as “the ability to influence a group toward the achievement of a vision or set of goals” (Robbins & Judge, 2022). Similarly, Northouse (2021) states that “leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (Northouse, 2021). Yukl (2013) even asserts that “leadership is the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it” (Barratt, 2004). Kotter (1990) adds a normative dimension when stating that “leadership defines what the future should look like, aligns people with that vision, and inspires them to make it happen” (Kotter, 1990).

These four definitions exhibit the same pattern: leadership is defined as the action of an individual (the leader) who influences or directs others (the followers) to achieve a common goal.

1. Identification of Binary Opposition and Hierarchy.

The discourse of modern or transformational leadership is fundamentally built upon the Leader/Follower binary opposition. In this opposition, the term "Leader" is inherently privileged active, superior, visionary while the "Follower" becomes subordinate, receptive, and dependent. This hierarchy reinforces the idea that organizational success depends exclusively on a central figure (Ford, Harding, & Learmonth, 2010).

2. Inversion and Subversion.

The next step is to invert and subvert this hierarchy by showing that the marginalized term (“Follower”) is actually constitutive of the dominant term. Without followers who recognize, respond, or even resist, the very concept of “Leader” collapses. Followers are thus active subjects who co-create leadership (Cooper & Burrell, 1988). The rigid boundary between leader and follower thus begins to blur. Leadership can no longer be understood as an attribute inherent in an individual but as a fluid and constantly negotiated relational and collaborative process.



The result of this deconstructive analysis shows that the dominant concept of leadership is a discursive construction that supports power structures. This aligns with the CMS agenda to give voice to marginalized groups and promote more democratic organizational forms (Alvesson & Willmott, 1996). Derrida's notion of *différance* further emphasizes that leadership has no fixed meaning; it is always shifting and contextually dependent. Thus, deconstruction opens up space for a plurality of leadership meanings, acknowledging that every individual in an organization has different perceptions and experiences of what constitutes good leadership, an emancipatory goal that is at the heart of the CMS project.

Simulacra Analysis: Hyperreality in Organizational Practice

This analysis focuses on the relationship between the representation (image) of management concepts and the practical reality they claim to represent, based on Baudrillard's stages of the sign. Signs in the contemporary world increasingly lose their connection to reality, producing hyperreality (Wolny, 2017).

Object of Analysis: CSR and Corporate Values.

Application of Baudrillard's stages:

1. Reflection of Reality (Stage 1): Ideally, a CSR report would be an accurate reflection of a company's actual practices. In many cases, however, this rarely occurs.
2. Masking Reality: CSR often masks contradictions such as exploitation or environmental damage a phenomenon widely known as greenwashing (Adler et al., 2007).
3. Masking the Absence of Reality (Stage 3): At this stage, the image conceals the fact that there is no substantive reality behind it. For example, a company claims to have an "innovative culture" in its annual report, while no significant innovation practices exist within it at all.
4. Pure Simulacrum (Stage 4): This is the apex of hyperreality. The image of CSR or "integrity" no longer has any reference to the company's internal reality at all but refers only to similar images from other companies. A company engages in CSR because "all companies do it," and the "reality" of CSR becomes the report itself, the awards received, or the media coverage, not the actual social or environmental impact. The sign no longer represents anything but itself in an endless circuit of images.



A case in point is the “greenwashing” by fossil fuel giants Pertamina and Shell Indonesia. Both energy companies aggressively promote sustainability campaigns with eco-friendly imagery, such as Pertamina’s tagline “Energy for a Sustainable Nation” or Shell’s “Powering Progress”. However, their own sustainability reports indicate that the largest proportion of their investment remains in the exploration and distribution of fossil fuels. In Baudrillard's framework, this image of sustainability functions as a sign that masks reality (stages 2 and 3), as the symbol of “green energy” conceals the fact that the core business structure remains dependent on unsustainable energy sources (Pertamina, 2023; Shell Indonesia, 2023).

In another case, Coca-Cola introduced its eco-friendly PlantBottle and H&M launched its Conscious Collection with the slogan “For the Planet.” However, a report from the Changing Markets Foundation (2023) found that over 90% of the materials in H&M's “sustainable” clothing line were still based on synthetic, non-biodegradable polyester, while Coca-Cola remains one of the world's largest plastic waste producers. In Baudrillard's logic, both campaigns operate at the stage of a pure simulacrum the “green” reality exists only in the marketing image, not in the actual production practices (Changing Markets Foundation, 2023).

The same applies to Corporate Values. Concepts like "innovation," "integrity," or "learning organization" displayed on websites and in annual reports often function as simulacra. According to Baudrillard, these signs have lost their reference to day-to-day practices and serve only as modern myths to legitimize the organization in the eyes of the public and employees. Employee participation, for instance, can become a displayed symbol of modernity rather than a genuinely empowering practice. In this logic, management no longer manages operational reality but rather manages simulation. Success is measured by how well the organization's image can be produced and maintained in the symbolic marketplace.

The results of this analysis indicate that many contemporary management practices operate within a hyperreality, where management no longer manages reality but rather manages simulation. Hanlon and Fleming (2024) underscore that CSR becomes a neoliberal tool that diverts attention from substantial social change to symbolic strategies that preserve corporate legitimacy (Hanlon & Fleming, 2024). This aligns with the CMS critique of managerial ideology, which shows how language and symbols are used to legitimize power while obscuring the fundamental contradictions of capitalism (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992).



Stage 3: Synthesis and Critical Reinterpretation

The final stage is to synthesize the insights from both analyses to formulate a comprehensive critical reinterpretation of management science.

Synthesis of Findings: The combination of deconstructive analysis and simulacra analysis provides a multi-layered critique. Deconstruction uncovers the internal contradictions and logical instability of management concepts, while simulacra analysis reveals the external function of these concepts as ideological images. Both show how management discourse, which claims to be a neutral representation of reality, in fact actively constructs that reality in a way that serves particular power relations.

Critical Reinterpretation within the CMS Debates: This analysis consciously positions itself within internal CMS debates. On one hand, it responds to the critique from the political economy perspective, as articulated by Paul Thompson (2004), who worried that a focus on postmodern discourse would neglect the material reality of exploitation. This research argues that in the era of late capitalism, the analysis of discourse and imagery is political economy analysis, as power operates massively through these symbolic mechanisms.

On the other hand, this research also engages with the debate on "engaged scholarship" (Van de Ven, 2007; Bartunek & Rynes, 2014). By not offering easy managerial solutions, this approach embodies a form of Foucauldian critique that aims to "disturb" and "problematize" what is taken for granted (Foucault, 1984). It creates a "productive paralysis" that forces practitioners and academics to reflect on their most fundamental assumptions, which is the first step toward more radical and emancipatory change. However, this approach is also wary of over-optimism about the power of purely discursive interventions, acknowledging the possibility of "failed performatives" when institutional conditions are not supportive (Butler, 1997).

Thus, this research contributes to the CMS agenda by offering a specific and in-depth model of analysis that avoids the traps of "formulaic radicalism" and "usual-suspectism" feared by internal critics like Spicer and Alvesson (2025). This postmodernist analysis is not merely an intellectual exercise but also an ethical and political intervention that enriches the agenda of Critical Management Studies. With state-of-the-art is an important part. This section can provide a more measurable illustration of your research contribution. This section can also be added to a



brief discussion. If you feel that this section is insufficient and unsuitable to be a separate section, the author(s) can integrate this section with section four (Results and Discussion).

CONCLUSION

This study has conducted a critical analysis of management science using the lens of postmodernism, specifically through the tools of Jacques Derrida's deconstruction and Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulacra. This analysis was positioned within the framework of Critical Management Studies (CMS) with the aim of dismantling the fundamental assumptions that underpin modern management discourse and practice. This chapter will summarize the main findings, synthesize the relationship between the findings and the research objectives, discuss the implications and contributions of the research, and outline its limitations and suggestions for future research.

The analysis in this study yielded two primary findings. First, through a deconstructive analysis of the concept of leadership, it was found that dominant managerial discourses, such as transformational leadership, are fundamentally built upon a hierarchical binary opposition (Leader/Follower). Deconstruction successfully demonstrated that this opposition is not a natural representation of reality but rather a discursive construction that supports power structures and neglects the constitutive role of the "follower." By dismantling this hierarchy, the meaning of leadership was shown to be unstable, relational, and open to a plurality of interpretations. Second, through a simulacra analysis of organizational representation practices like Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and corporate values, it was found that contemporary management often operates within a hyperreality. In this condition, the image or sign ("social concern," "integrity," "innovation") becomes more important than the substance of operational practice itself. These practices have frequently reached the stage of a pure simulacrum, where the representation no longer has any reference to reality other than to the circuit of images itself, thus functioning as an ideological mechanism for corporate legitimation.

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