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To cite this version:

Rafael Alcadipani, John Hassard, Gazi Islam. “ I Shot the Sheriff ”: Irony, Sarcasm and the Changing Nature of Workplace Resistance. Journal of Management Studies, 2018, 55 (8), pp.1452-1487. halshs-01959081

HAL Id: halshs-01959081

https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01959081

Submitted on 18 Dec 2018

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I Shot the Sheriff: Lean Manufacturing and The Changing Faces of Workplace Resistance

Alcadipani, R., Hassard, J. & Islam, G. (in press) I shot the sheriff": Resisting lean production through irony and sarcasm. *Journal of Management Studies.*

Abstract

The spread of Lean management has fuelled debates over the changing nature of workplace domination. While Lean discourses often espouse a 'human relations' approach, research has suggested the proliferation of coercion systems and questioned whether Lean is instead shorthand for cost-cutting and new forms of domination. The varied interpretations of Lean have explained the heterogeneity of worker responses, including forms of resistance. Our ethnography explores this heterogeneity by examining the implementation of Lean in a printing factory and tracing the emergence of shopfloor opposition. Various tactics were devised by workers, ranging from tangible procedures such as sabotage and working-to-rule to more subtle forms reflecting irony and contempt. We argue that the distinctive manifestations of domination emerging during the Lean programme stimulated particular forms of worker reaction, which are explained through fieldwork illustrations. Overall, we produce a theoretical explanation of domination and resistance that builds upon and extends the extant scholarship.

Keywords: Ethnography; Domination; Resistance; Lean Production; Organizational Change

INTRODUCTION

Management and organizational scholarship has increasingly noted the heterogeneous and complex nature of domination and resistance at work (Courpasson, 2017; Courpasson et al., 2017; Courpasson & Vallas, 2016; Fleming & Spicer, 2007; Mumby et al,, 2017; Prasad & Prasad, 2000; Thomas et al., 2011; Willmott, 2013). We follow Courpasson and Vallas' (2016, p.7) view that domination can never be total, presupposes a level of freedom on the part of those who are subjected to it, and is almost always a 'fractured phenomenon, riddled with complex and intersecting forms'. Indeed several decades of research have built upon the idea that domination and resistance can take multiple and complimentary forms (Hodson, 1995), giving rise to theorizing about the multiple 'faces' (Fleming & Spicer, 2007), 'quadrants' (Mumby et al, 2017) or 'affordances' (Alcadipani & Islam, 2017) of resistance. With this multiplicity of forms, domination and resistance have become somewhat fluid targets, leading to questions of what constitutes 'real' versus, for example, 'decaf' resistance (Contu, 2008). Amid such complexity, recent surveys have lamented that we still know little about how 'structure(s) of domination shape the forms that resistance takes? And in what ways does resistance return the favour' (Courpasson & Vallas, 2016, p.3).

One explanation for this conundrum is that in any given organizational setting, it is difficult to differentiate the types of domination and resistance that operate – because any single policy can be subject to diverse interpretations (Islam, Holm & Karjalainen, 2017). Although domination and resistance seem to respond to each other (Hodson, 1995), forms of resistance most likely depend on how domination is understood on the ground, suggesting a 'bottom-up' approach to examining domination-resistance dynamics (e.g., Ybema & Hover, 2017). Moreover, because actors` understandings of domination are likely to be heterogeneous (Fleming & Spicer, 2007), attempts to define 'real' resistance depend on actors` constructions of domination from within this heterogeneity.

In this paper, we examine how workers individually and collectively understand their situations so as to promote or reject certain types of resistance. We advance the argument that domination occurs not only in ways that are already organizationally constituted, but also within manifestations of routine practices involving interpersonal interactions, especially between managers and those they manage. While a broad body of literature has recognized various reactions to the implementation of Lean (Stewart et al, 2009; Zanoni, 2011), we move a step further in systematizing these approaches by showing their relational implications and couching them within a new theory of domination and resistance. Our research question in this regard is: '*How do managerial approaches generate heterogeneous forms of resistance, and how do these forms reflect different manifestations of domination latent in a given approach?*'

We examine this question empirically in the specific context of resistance to 'Lean Management' (mainly hereafter 'Lean'), a series of re-engineering practices receiving much support (Liker, 2004; Liker & Morgan, 2006; Womack et al., 1990) but also much criticism (Carter et al., 2013; Delbridge, et al., 2000; McCann et al., 2015; Rinehardt et al., 1997) over recent decades. Lean is symptomatic of the ambivalence of contemporary work experience because of a perplexing duality noted by scholars, in which Lean seems at once empowering yet exploiting, decentralizing yet controlling (e.g., Anderson-Connolly et al, 2002; Niepcel & Molleman, 1998). Such interpretative variability creates a dilemma about how to conceptualize resistance potential within Lean and raises questions about the status of workplaces claiming the Lean moniker. For our research, it is exactly this surfeit of interpretation on Lean, its implementation and management that makes possible the analysis of different configurations of domination and resistance, and notably so in terms of how they play out empirically on the ground.

The paper proceeds as follows: First we argue that exploring the diverse understanding of domination and resistance around a specific strategic policy allows for exploration of

resistance that moves beyond current analytical bifurcations, such as overt/covert or material/symbolic (Courpasson & Vallas, 2016; Mumby et al, 2017; Ybema & Horvers, 2017). Second, we describe the results of a 9-month ethnographic study of Lean implementation in a U.K. printing factory (PrintCo), detailing how Lean manifests dynamics of domination and resistance at three levels: a sociotechnical level of practice; an ideological level of rhetorical justification; and a fantasmatic level of domination-laden imagination, We argue that each involves distinct (and sometimes contradictory) domination and resistance tactics, and such heterogeneity creates the appearance of inconsistency in the nature and implications of Lean policy. Finally, in the discussion, we draw out implications of this view of domination and resistance for management and organization studies and suggest some potential limitations of this perspective.

DOMINATION AND RESISTANCE

Noting their co-production in workplace settings, scholars have explored how forms of domination and resistance relate to each other in complex ways (Ashcraft, 2005; Mumby, 2005; Hodson, 1995). Stemming in part from interest in post-structuralist perspectives, researchers have noted how Foucault's focus on the production of domination and resistance at the level of micro-practices (e.g., Foucault, 1980, 2004) requires us to reconceptualize traditional views of worker resistance (Knights, 2016; Thomas et al, 2011; Vallas & Hill, 2012). Hodson's (1995) work, for example, illustrated how organizational resistance depends on how members experience forms of domination. Studying resistance thus involves understanding the bottom-up interpretations of the subjects of domination (Jermier, et al., 1994). Domination and resistance are, therefore, considered emergent properties of groups, rather than forms or types of domination systems existing outside of micro-relations.

So as to not assume a theoretical frame of domination and resistance a priori, we bracket the question of types and focus, instead, on the experience of domination in what Deranty (2016, p.33) called a 'phenomenology of social experience'. This means that, rather than presume the nature of the system within which domination and resistance relate, we leave the question open of how actors interpret the system, albeit recognizing they are likely to vary in how they conceive this relation. In other words, a single organizational policy could manifest itself in heterogeneous and even overlapping approaches to domination and resistance by actors. To cite Lukes (2005, p.113), what seems like domination or resistance through one lens might not seem so through another and thus 'one thing is clear: this is not a straightforwardly factual question'.

Shifting the question from 'how do organizational policies involve different forms of domination and resistance?' to 'how do actors understand domination and manifest resistance around a given organizational policy?' allows us to see the policy as a social and discursive construction. There are two main benefits to this. First, it reframes questions such as 'is X type of resistance only "decaf", and not "real", resistance?' (Contu, 2008, p.364), which presume an a priori diagnostic for domination. Instead, our approach frames such questions in terms of what are the forms of presumed domination manifested in a given range of resistance strategies. In this way, we seek to open debates around resistance so as to examine underlying presumptions about the nature of domination (Fleming & Spicer, 2007; Hodson, 1995).

Second, it permits analysis of situations in which multiple understandings of domination and resistance co-exist (e.g., Endrissat et al, 2015; Ekman, 2014). In a given organization, for instance, strikes (Lambert, 2005) and sabotage (Linstead, 1985) can co-exist with expressions of humour and irony (Collinson, 1992), each reflecting different experiences of organization (in)justice and making implicit claims about sources of domination. Allowing these diverse forms to share the organizational stage reveals an aspect of the political arena otherwise

obscured by presuming a single or dominant organizational dynamic (e.g. Thomas & Hardy, 2011).

Such an approach therefore is most likely to be useful in situations of ambiguity regarding the meaning and objectives of an organizational policy and in which there are competing understandings of the domination relations enabled by the policy (e.g., Islam et al., 2017). In the current study, we develop this approach through an examination of Lean that makes sense of competing understandings and heterogeneous responses in the field. Taken as a single, unified system, this heterogeneity would be difficult to explain, raising the question of whether Lean was 'really' being implemented at all. However shifting the question in the manner outlined allows us to consider the heterogeneity of Lean as significant in itself and thus to contribute to current understandings of Lean to fill a gap in the literature gap, as we explain below.

LEAN AS CONTESTED TERRAIN

As noted, managerial discourses around Lean have spawned a wealth of proponents and detractors over recent decades. Beginning in the 1970s with high profile applications in quality management in the Japanese automotive industry, Lean was described by Wickens (1993, p.77) as 'a holistic system comprising many parts – JIT, zero buffer stocks, total quality control, building quality in rather than post-build rectifications, maximum delegation to workers, small lot production, continuous improvements, quick set-up times, standardized work, total preventive maintenance, visual control systems, and team-working'. As a re-engineering technique, Lean has been touted as improving efficiency, empowering workers and promoting well-being (Liker, 2004; Womack et al., 1990), but it has also been denounced as reducing autonomy (Delbridge et al., 2000), lengthening working hours (Hassard et al., 2009) and augmenting stress (Carter et al, 2013). Widespread dissatisfaction with – and resistance to –

Lean have been well documented (Anderson-Connolly et al., 2002; Stewart et al., 2009), broaching questions of how resistance responds to, and shapes, new workplace domination (e.g., Hodson, 1995; Knights & McCabe, 1999; 2000) – a theme that has been echoed in recent organizational literature (Fleming & Spicer, 2014; Gunawardana, 2014).

However, much duality persists in the Lean literature, with this creating an ongoing puzzle as to what actually occurs in workplaces claiming to operate under Lean policies and practices. Is this ambivalence simply an artefact of Lean's heterogeneity and context dependence across workplaces, or is there a disjuncture between the appearances and reality of Lean in practice? One hint comes from recent work on the 'Lean spell' (McCann et al, 2015), suggesting that Lean might be best understood by looking beyond its 'objective' technical features and focusing on competing discourses, which can dilute its various meanings to the extent of rendering Lean 'somewhat meaningless' (McCann et al, 2015, p. 1557). The apparent disconnect between positive discourses of Lean and the often negative reactions to emerge during implementation (McCann et al, 2015) suggest a theoretical problem beyond simply establishing empirical 'effects'. Rather, it suggests ambiguity over what Lean actually is and how it should be conceptualized as a system (Niepiel & Mollerman, 1998). McCann et al (2015) took a step towards recognizing the diverse and heterogeneous analytical levels undergirding Lean (McCann et al, 2015) by identifying this potential for multiplicity.

Traditionally, Lean has been studied as a sociotechnical system (cf. Denkbaar, 1997; Niepiel & Mollerman, 1998), that is, a mechanical managerial approach involving a 'unity of preparation, execution and control' (Dankbaar 1997, p.570). Authors have also contextualized Lean as progressive – as a technological development beyond those of craft and mass forms of production (Holweg, 2007; Maxton & Wormald, 2004; Wickens, 1993; Womack et al, 1990), with, notably, Lean adding a layer of bottom-up social coordination to traditional Tayloristic systems (Dankbaar, 1997; Mehri, 2006). Critiques of Lean, however, question whether it

‘provides more challenging and fulfilling work for employees at every level’ (Womack et al., 1990, p.225) and point instead to work intensification (Hassard et al., 2009) and rigid formalization (Delbridge et al., 2000).

Disillusionment with Lean has raised questions about why so often it produces organizational and managerial imagery that disintegrates when analysed in practice. One explanation is that beyond its sociotechnical features, Lean reflects ideological characteristics of pretence, facade and concealment (Wickens, 1993). In this analysis, we use the term ‘ideological’ to refer to the *use* of ideas – not to explain social reality but to justify a system of domination through promoting a particular (possibly false) image of reality (Mitchell, 1994; Vallas, 2003). Contrary to claims of greater empowerment, enrichment and responsibility, Lean is frequently associated with ‘authoritarian’ management (Carter et al, 2013), with Thompson and Smith (2009, p.919) suggesting that ‘far from providing a replacement to the mind-numbing stress of mass production’, Lean systems ‘intensi[fy] work by finding yet new ways to remove obstacles to the extraction of effort’. Similarly, Coffey (2006) claimed that Lean’s central innovation actually consists of producing industrial uniformity. Lean can therefore reflect an innovation primarily in worker domination (e.g., Boje & Winsor, 1993; Carter et al., 2013; Danford, 1998; Delbridge, 1998; Sewell & Wilkinson, 1992; Stewart et al, 2009), causing workplace resistance to become ‘increasingly fragmented and marginal’ (Delbridge, 1995, p.803) and to have ‘gone underground’ (Contu, 2008, p.364).

Recent studies have clearly articulated this ideological function during the implementation of Lean (McCann et al, 2015; Stewart et al., 2016). However, McCann et al’s (2015) study hinted at a third Lean dynamic – Lean as ‘fantasy’ – as reflected in their analysis of Lean’s ‘spell'. Although McCann et al primarily discuss ideology, we see fantasy complementing the ideological view they develop. In their analysis, issues of fantasy implicitly

underpin a position in which ‘the facts have not been allowed to get in the way’ (McCann et al, 2015, p.1560; see also Sloterdijk, 1988).

In summary, a brief review of the literature illustrates the heterogeneous possibilities arising from the analysis of Lean. In particular, understanding domination and resistance on the shopfloor requires appreciation of how various framings of Lean are experienced and interpreted in practice. Ethnographic observation is essential in this respect, serving to explore how the Lean concept is constituted as a workplace phenomenon. This leads us to focus on our main empirical research question: *How do the discourses and practices of Lean generate heterogeneous forms of resistance and reflect different conceptions of Lean domination*?

METHODS

Our empirical material comes from an ethnographic study (Van Maanen, 1979; Neyland, 2008; Ybema et al., 2009) of the implementation and operation of Lean management and production in a factory in the United Kingdom. The site studied (given the pseudonym ‘PrintCo’) is the main printing facility of a large newspaper concern. Founded in the early 1950s and one of the largest newspaper printing sites in Europe, its core technology consists of nine presses running almost 24 hours per day. The site employs approximately 300 staff, of which roughly one-third work on the shopfloor, or ‘Press Hall’. The management structure for the operation is outlined in Figure 1.

Figure 1 about here

Research Setting

Before explaining our data collection and analysis, it is important to set the implementation of Lean at PrintCo in context against the history of industrial relations and workplace change in

newspaper printing, as well as in this particular organization. For much of the industry's history, newspaper printers were regarded as the embodiment of the skilled blue collar worker. Newspaper production was extremely labour intensive and required a great deal of expertise and technique (see: Child, 1967; Wallace & Kalleberg, 1982; Zimbalist, 1979). In addition, until about 40 years ago, trades unions played a major role in managing and running newspaper production in the UK. Traditionally, the unionized 'Chapel' within a newspaper printing factory reflected a self-governing worker structure – one aimed at guaranteeing printers' interests by dealing with health issues, organizing benefits, and performing disciplinary hearings, as well as managing staff levels, overtime, employees' forms of contributions, hiring and dismissals (Littleton, 1992; Sykes, 1960; Thompson, 1947). Printing sites were 'closed-shops', meaning that only Chapel members were permitted to work in a given factory. Preference in hiring was given to family members of those who were already members of the Chapel.

This active union role in the newspaper printing industry was severely undermined following Rupert Murdoch's decision, backed by Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government, to move the publications *The Times*, *The Sun* and *The News of the World* from Fleet Street to Wapping in early 1986, dismissing in the process over 5,000 unionized employees. During this move, *News International* advocated very different working conditions for printers, ones that that involved incorporating, for example, flexible working patterns, no-strike agreements, implementation of new technology, and the rejection of closed shop conditions. These actions generated a year-long conflict between the unions and Murdoch's company, an event that represented the beginning of the end for formal union predominance in the newspaper printing industry (Littleton, 1992). Nevertheless, the historical existence of the trade unions in printing shops had left a cultural legacy of rank and file autonomy in the sector: one that may explain the recurrent resistance to new work practices in the period since.

However, the new deregulated working conditions meant that traditional forms of worker opposition would give way to more subtle and less overt resistance techniques.

At the time of the current research, the newspaper industry was again facing a crisis and its long-term existence had been called into question (Jones, 2009; Lowrey & Gade, 2011). According to executives at PrintCo the 'best-case scenario' was that the print shop's demand would be '33% lower' in a decade's time. Over the previous two decades, PrintCo had implemented a rolling programme of replacing its electro-mechanical presses with digital machines, with this representing a major investment for the firm. The new, computerized presses required fewer workers and demanded substantial changes in labour practices.

In terms of work structure, the PrintCo presses had been composed of three floors plus one underground floor housing the paper reel. Figure 2 depicts the press structure of the old presses. The number one printer leads the press crew and is responsible for production at the press control room level (placed at the machine ground floor). From the control room, the number one and two printers can observe the press and easily climb the machine if necessary. The number one printer is also responsible for machine setup and maintenance, and all paperwork related to a production run, assisted by the number two. The reel handler is located underground at the bottom of the press and prepares and replaces the reels. The Press Hall Duty Manager oversees the work of all old machines newspaper production activities (see Figure 2)

Figure 3, by contrast, depicts the press structure of the new machines, outfitted with an automated reel control system. This system allows the new presses to carry out the work formerly performed by the heel handler, making this role redundant. Moreover, under the Lean multitasking requirement, operators one and two have equal responsibility for running the newspaper press, and the team leader oversees production across all 4 new machines.

Given the reduced labour requirements, a voluntary redundancy exercise was advanced, under which 65 shopfloor operatives left the company while the research was carried out. With

the introduction of the new machines, a proportion of PrintCo workers were selected and trained for the new technology, while other workers remained on the old presses. This apparent discrimination created a significant division among the workforce. During the transition, senior management frequently used the introduction of new technology to strengthen the case for adopting Lean production. They argued that Lean methods were essential for the new presses to be successful, for they represented 'state-of-the-art operational technologies'.

Figure 2 about here

Figure 3 about here

Data Collection

After several months of access negotiations, an agreement was reached for us to conduct in-depth observational research at PrintCo. The ethnography was directed primarily at analysing organizational change, focusing on the implementation of the embryonic Lean production programme. The research involved spending almost nine months studying operational activities, mostly in the Press Hall, described as the 'heart' of production. The change programme was monitored in real-time, three to five days per week, covering both day and night shifts. As the field researcher (one of the authors) was not an employee, he could liaise freely with work teams in the Press Hall and also speak with managers during the day. Initially, the fieldworker's presence seemed to create suspicion among the workforce, but a level of trust appeared to increase over time and markedly so after some informal 'tests' were conducted by the workforce. On several occasions, for example, workers disrupted machinery in the

fieldworker's presence; raising the suspicion they were doing so to determine whether he would report them to management. He did not.

Beyond making observations, the fieldworker participated in the work of the shopfloor, frequently asking press operatives to instruct him in practical tasks; which they generally did enthusiastically. In some situations, the fieldworker found it impossible not to become 'involved' in the work itself, especially when workers needed help carrying heavy equipment or cleaning machine parts at busy production times. In terms of data collection, after completing each day's observations, handwritten field notes of events were compiled (Fretz et al., 1995). In addition several photographs were taken to illustrate workplace artefacts or fieldwork situations.

Data Analysis

Once the fieldwork was completed, the research material was 'open coded' (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996), with field notes being read and re-read to identify recurrent themes. Coding began with general concern for organizational changes, but soon turned to specific issues of Lean implementation, as it became evident that these were central to understanding how workers and managers were interpreting this major change initiative. Given these concerns, the paper draws mainly upon material coded initially under 'Lean production' and 'resistance to Lean'.

During coding, it was apparent that the Lean 'tools' being implemented (e.g., machine pre-checks, worker multitasking, standard operational procedures, visual management boards) were perceived in heterogeneous ways across the factory. Note was taken of the range of issues manifesting themselves in relation to the changes being made. To complete the initial coding, we connected these various concerns (referred to as first order codes in Figure 4) with issues from the academic literature on Lean (referred to as second order codes in Figure 4), including recent attempts to understand the ways Lean is interpreted and framed sociologically (e.g.,

McCann et al, 2015; Stewart et al, 2009). This coding revealed several key concepts emerging around not only the use of tangible forms of resistance to Lean but also forms of irony and contempt, primarily related to the actions of senior managers. Our analysis therefore led us to identify a range of diverse resistance manifestations, such as practical resistance (see Braverman, 1974; Edwards, 1979; Goodrich, 1920), ironic resistance (see Brimeyer et al., 2004; Fleming & Spicer, 2003; Hoyle & Wallace, 2008) and resistance through contempt (Höpfl, 1995; Melwani & Barsade, 2011; Pelzer, 2005), with the last being expressed mainly as scorn (Gottman, 1993). After further analysis of our ethnographic data we concluded that the Lean change initiative at PrintCo was reflected in three principal forms of domination – *practice*, *ideology* and *fantasy* – and importantly, that these were associated with corresponding forms of resistance (see Figure 4).

Given our interest in the interrelation between domination and resistance, it was not sufficient simply to produce taxonomic lists of domination and resistance manifestations. Instead, based on the premise that such manifestations depend on how dominance and resistance are framed by participants, we shifted the focus to examine the analytical levels that actors themselves seemingly used. Thus, while the first analytical step involved listing domination and resistance categories, the next saw these categories organized into discrete pairs informed by the findings of our fieldwork (see Table I). For example, an employee using scorn would use it in a specific context and directed at a particular form of perceived domination. Ultimately this process allowed us to identify and differentiate the dynamics of three levels of domination-resistance pairing – namely the sociotechnical, the ideological, and the fantasmatic (see Table I).

Figure 4 about here

Table I about here

Our second analytical step therefore assessed various standpoints taken towards Lean. These were considered reflexive on the part of participants because they considered organizational situations in diverse ways and adopted various resistance positions in response (e.g., Endrissat et al, 2015): At the sociotechnical level, participants framed Lean as a set of mechanical and architectural technologies which they responded to with direct practical resistance, such as paying lip service to commands or working-to-rule. At the level of ideology, participants framed Lean as embodying contradictions and forms of duplicity, often reacting with ironic and critical comments aimed at revealing Lean's 'true' nature. At the level of fantasy, participants viewed Lean as ostensibly irrelevant and as simply a cloak for the implicit assertion of managerial domination, often reacting with scorn aimed at deriding the authority of the 'boss'. Analysing the data in terms of empirical tactics and reflexive interpretations allowed us to move beyond producing a basic taxonomy of Lean responses and to explore the relational positions underlying domination and resistance matching. Figure 4 provides an overview of the empirical analysis process, and Table I lists conceptual aspects of the main explanatory levels inferred.

FINDINGS

For Courpasson and Vallas (2016, p.7), domination is never total, and instead 'domination owes its very existence to the fact of resistance'. Below, we use thick description (Ponterotto, 2006) to demonstrate the contours of the respective manifestations of domination and resistance at PrintCo and their relations. In so doing, our descriptions begin with assessing the background situation within the factory, moving on to explain how a given manifestation of domination was realized, and then describing the nature of resistance as it unfolded.

Lean as Sociotechnical – Practical Resistance

Resistance via practical action in response to direct attempts at behavioural domination was a daily occurrence at PrintCo and was easily observable. Workers encountered physical coercion through managerial directives, the spatial production layout, the exigencies of technology, and the deployment of Lean tools consistent with classical descriptions of labour processes (Braverman, 1974). Such manifestations of domination were met with resistance that addressed specific material constraints with practical responses, whether by omission (e.g. paying lip service, foot dragging, failing to report incidents, passing on work) or commission (e.g. acts of sabotage, complaints, industrial action).

For instance, as part of the Lean programme, a 'pre-check' for the presses had been established for the team leaders during night shifts and immediately before the press started. This initiative promised to reduce downtime and increase average output as part of a suite of Lean tools. For its implementation, every night, immediately after the shift started, duty managers circulated a pre-check form with required pre-production actions to be completed and signed by the team leaders. Most printers, however, resented the pre-check, questioning the need for the policy. As one printer noted, '*We do pre-checks anyway – management doesn't get it that every machine is different and what has to be checked before it runs changes from one press to another'*. Another commented, '*Why the hell did they send this sheet of paper if there are already pre-check lists on the computer?'*

Most printers simply signed and returned the form to the duty managers without actually performing the required checks. In response to the new policy, the duty managers would collect the form and place it in a file without any further verification that the process had been completed. A duty manager noted that conducting a general pre-check on every machine was

'*just a waste of time'*. Bypassing the official process and instead paying lip service to the pre-checks was therefore a practical act of resistance on the part of shopfloor employees.

Resistance to the implementation of Lean led some printers to adopt more reckless approaches to production. As one duty manager suggested, '*The pals* [co-workers] *are fed up – they're doing a really bad job due to this Lean bullshit'*. In one event, a duty manager known as 'The Scab' (a nickname given because historically he had crossed union picket lines) informed the Press Hall manager that a crew (team) had sent out a number of '*bad copies as if they were good*'. To substantiate his point, The Scab gave the Press Hall manager some of the bad copies, which had been printed from a damaged 'blanket' – a rubber cover inside the press printing cylinders, which is regularly damaged but does not always produce poor copies. One of the operative's main duties under the Lean mandate was to assess regularly the quality of copies during the printing process, with the team leader having discretion to recommend replacement of a blanket if copy quality is affected. Nevertheless, in response to this initiative, one team leader noted, '*Who cares about checking the blankets? They want us to do it more now due to this Lean shit. So we're doing just the opposite – we're not checking anything'*.

As a consequence of The Scab's actions, however, all operatives on the press received a formal written warning about the bad copies and the importance of adhering to the new Lean protocols. This reprimand was considered excessive for the nature of the incident and caused much consternation on the shopfloor. Subsequently, the printers started to '*change blankets for fun'*, meaning that any blanket with minor damage was reported for replacement – an essentially inefficient practice on the Press Hall and one tantamount to sabotage. As one operative suggested, *'They want us to change blankets; let's do as they wish!'* The next week, 125 blankets were replaced, in contrast to the usual 30. *'I am sure the company will be paying a very high bill for blankets this month, and The Scab will have his fat arse kicked'*, said one of

the team leaders. The Press Hall manager remained unaware of the situation until the financial manager queried the significant cost increase for blankets two months later.

Another incident involved the quest under Lean to establish 'multitasking' among the workforce. According to the production director, *'Lean advocates that workers must multitask – they must be able to perform various jobs so that their job is more enriching'*. This directive saw the material handlers (workers from the pre-press department, Figure 1) required to complete what was the heel handlers' work in the old press (Figure 2) – specifically to 'dress the heels' or mark the paper rolls with tape before going to press. This change derived from the fact there were no longer any reel handlers in the new presses (Figure 3). Under the factory's traditional industrial relations agreement, this additional task would warrant higher wages for material handlers, but this was not the case under the new multi-tasking philosophy of Lean. In response, the shopfloor's trade union representative suggested, '*I am raising my concerns with management. Our industrial agreement needs to be respected'*. At the same time, the material handlers refused to perform the job '*on health and safety grounds'*, in a move senior management considered a rouse for avoiding additional work. During lunch, the fieldworker asked one of the material handlers about the issue, and he replied (laughing), *'This new task is very unsafe for us – the company cannot force us to perform unsafe tasks'*. Another material handler explained the situation in greater detail:

> *'I refused to do the job. We'd spoken to each other and decided we were to say there was no risk assessment done and no safety system in place. I didn't refuse the training because we can't refuse to be trained. But then a senior manager came in and said that I should sign a piece of paper saying I was refusing to work. The union guy then came in and they had a discussion. But I wouldn't sign anything. They annoy us with this Lean shit, so we'll annoy them'*.

The multitasking mandate became a very intense issue. Ultimately, it was to constitute a stand-

off between the shopfloor, backed by the union, and senior management, taking recourse to Lean and its principles. On the one hand, the managing director (MD) argued, *'they [shopfloor] took their action – we'll hold our position'*. On the other, the union representative suggested, *'we're not in favour of job demarcation, but we need to draw a line somewhere'*.

As one senior manager told the fieldworker, the implementation of Lean had created *'a bad attitude on the shopfloor'* because '*they [shopfloor] are standing back and not dealing with problems – nobody is dealing with problems'*. He went on to describe a situation on one of the presses in which the operatives, ignoring a problem, instead *'just stood around making jokes and waited for the calibration crew to arrive'*. For this manager, workers who had previously *'made more effort'* and *'done their best to help'* had now *'abandoned going the extra mile'* because they *'felt persecuted'* under Lean.

These examples – machine pre-checks; replacing blankets; multitasking – all represent arenas of struggle over practical dimensions of the work regime. These engagements arguably situate Lean as an emerging sociotechnical system aimed at securing enhanced control of operations and operatives. In turn however efforts by senior management to bolster levels of sociotechnical domination were met by a range of practical forms of resistance on behalf of the shopfloor, such as paying lip service, working-to-rule, or promoting industrial action, actions of an essentially explicit and material nature. Nevertheless, within the wider realm of the Lean initiative at PrintCo other, more subtle, manifestations of resistance were found to emerge.

Lean as Ideological – Ironic Resistance

The implementation of Lean also rested on ideological grounds – notably claims about Lean's superior knowledge base; claims serving to legitimize Lean policies while de-legitimizing worker's personal, experiential, knowledge as outmoded and passé. Worker resistance to such claims involved acts of debunking, discrediting or unmasking aspects of the Lean agenda –

framing Lean discourses as flawed or erroneous in comparison to the 'common sense' of traditional craft- or skill-based knowledge. Such manifestations of resistance highlight the contestation of 'truth' in terms of claim and counter-claim (Mitchell, 1994). Because irony functions to highlight contradictions and create dissonance (Cooren et al, 2013), it offers a response by unmasking dominant narratives. As we describe below, such manifestations or gestures of resistance draw largely on discursive and situational forms of irony.

An important aspect of the ideological struggle over Lean involved the clash between the entrenched experiential knowledge of shopfloor workers and the new, purportedly generic, nature of Lean principles and policies. Intimating the essentially particular nature of the Press Hall's work, duty manager Peter suggested that newspaper printing involves *'putting three things together that usually don't mix – paper, water and ink'*. Given the high speeds reached by the printing machines, he continued *'it's not like making photocopies*' or *'pushing a button',* for the work requires *'continuous engagement'* with the unique *'demands of the presses'.* This specificity obliged workers constantly to *'tune'* their machines and extract sample newspapers to check whether their adjustments had *'improve[d] the print run'*. When significant temporal pressures (reflected in the habitual industry mantra that *'yesterday's news doesn't sell'*) are combined with countless possibilities for error in an extremely complex process, possessing practical knowledge of a highly contextual kind was deemed indispensable by the workforce for achieving efficient production. A project manager with previous experience as a printer expressed the situation thus:

> *'You might get a paper reel in May, which will be a totally different reel from production in December. So you might get different faults in winter than you might get in summer because of the consumables you're using … There's a lot of peripherals involved that change the way you produce a newspaper. You might get*

a cold spell, and that affects your ink. You get pumping problems with your ink because it's frozen in the pipes. Things like that'.

While printers considered their work as demanding *'very specific know-how'* – knowledge obtained only through a considerable amount of practice – the Lean consulting literature embraced by senior management emphasized generic management principles – *'from manufacturing to healthcare'* – and with the central philosophy that *'one size fits all'*. Such standardization seemed to subvert many of the foundations of operational knowledge practised on PrintCo's shopfloor. Following the onset of Lean, senior management talked in terms of adopting *'pillars'* of practice as keys to operational success. Management's discourses on Lean reflected externally generated consultancy metaphors of the factory – such as a *'house'* being built on *'new foundations'* and comprising the types of *'people, organization and culture'* appropriate to supporting Lean innovations. The four main '*pillars of innovation*' associated with the prime objective of *'continuous improvement'* were reducing *'various forms of waste'*, practising *'visual management and control'*, ensuring *'good organizational housekeeping'*, and above all, developing 's*tandardized operations'* for most work-related tasks.

Unimpressed by the claims to superior knowledge implied in the 'pillars' of Lean production, irony was the response of many on the shopfloor to these truth claims. Operatives highlighted what they saw as contradiction or paradox when efficiency principles came into contrast with proven and meaningful local operational practices (see Jarzabkowski & Le, 2016). The primary form of irony, *situational* irony (Lucariello, 1994), takes aim at contradictions between purported and actual realities (cf. Cooren et al, 2013), for instance, saying "thank goodness for technology!" when a machine breaks down. A key example at PrintCo was the implementation of the Standard Operational Procedures (SOPs) in the Press Hall. Representing the Lean principle of providing instructions for achieving *'uniformity of performance'* (Womack, et al., 1990), SOPs came to adopt a major profile in the company. However the

contradiction between the specific nature of Press Hall operations and the generic nature of Lean prescriptions was becoming clear. As Steve, one of the production managers, noted, *'The old presses alone have more than a hundred and forty [procedures]'*, making them *'not really suited to this type of Lean analysis'*. Also for Steve, *'There are simply too many procedures – it's impossible to teach [SOPs] and for the pals [shopfloor workers] to follow them'*. He continued with irony, *'I just write them [SOPs] because health and safety law requires us to do this Lean thing'*.

Shopfloor workers regularly explained to the fieldworker how traditionally they had learned operational procedures from each other, acting according to their own understanding of what 'works'. The logic often expressed was *'what works for a press in a particular situation does not necessarily work in another'*. As operatives frequently changed how they performed everyday tasks, SOPs – if strictly applied – would block such flexibility. Because tools and equipment *'differ[ed] from machine to machine'*, operatives argued that operating methods should respect *'the situation at hand'*. Homogenizing work processes through using SOPs was considered anathema to local knowledge and thus potentially detrimental to newspaper production at PrintCo. After attending the Lean training programme, many duty managers and team leaders expressed doubts about whether the factory would be able to *'print a single newspaper'* if *'most of the Lean tools were applied*. Responding to the claim of efficiency, one team leader remarked ironically, *'Management says that Lean improves performance – let's implement it and see how well we do!'* Ironic statements such as these highlighted the discursive struggle between shopfloor workers' faith in enhancing efficiency through hands-on experience and management's belief that generic procedures held greater promise in this regard.

At PrintCo, Lean principles were also reflected in a subset of activities labelled 'Visual Management and Control' (VMC). The concept was that VCM would promote effectiveness in the plant because *'at any time, a glance at a [VCM] chart will give an idea of the actual*

situation' (Greif, 1991, p.109). In practice, this referred to deploying visual aids to produce a perpetual public display of the status of production. This graphic system placed a heavy emphasis on order – so that *'an abnormality can be identified IMMEDIATELY'* (PrintCo Lean training materials). However, in so doing, the practice essentially outsourced the professional judgement of printers.

The use of visualization methods was, in fact, one of the first Lean initiatives undertaken at PrintCo. Here a series of VCM boards – illustrating information such as production status and faults on presses – were erected in what became known as the *'War Room'*. Shortly after their installation, the boards drew a range of ironic comments from production and duty managers. The latter, often with many years of experience in the Press Hall, felt the new system flew in the face of *'established and effective practice'*. After the boards were installed, duty managers noted that operatives were frequently being removed from their normal production activities to *'waste time writing information on the boards and discuss what's written'*. In the event of a technical problem, established practice involved a manager eliciting help from the work team or an engineer. With the new system, managers complained to one another that staff performed *'board-related tasks'* while the presses were stopped – a situation in which *'mindless bureaucracy'* was preventing them from maintaining *'effective production'*, a direct contrast with the claims for scientific control. A typically ironic comment was made by a duty manager drawn away from a shopfloor problem to complete a *'board task'* in the War Room: '*All is well in the Press Hall; that's why I'm here*!' Another duty manager faced with a heavy operational workload commented similarly, *'My day is just starting; that's why I am doing this pie chart shit'*. The notion of *'pie chart management'*, in fact, became widely diffused within the Press Hall to signify the contradictory nature of Lean activities. From our observations most shopfloor workers however seemed unaware of the SOPs they were supposed to adopt. Meanwhile, some duty managers suggested they put fictitious numbers on VCM boards *'just to make a show'* and

thus to satisfy the system's demands. A duty manager described being *'summoned'* to attend Lean training and how he had been resistant because it represented *'more total bollocks, more fucking pie charts'*.

As Lean principles seemingly failed to connect with the peculiarities of Press Hall operations, shopfloor workers highlighted a progressive disconnection between concept and reality in Lean activities. Production manager Steve suggested, '*I have no time to watch this fucking course on Lean – I need to do* real *work here in the office'*. The irony lies in contrasting Lean, which was supposed to increase productivity, with the real work of running the shopfloor. In such instances, Lean incited situational irony by suggesting that completing the VCM boards produced exactly the opposite of what was being claimed. A duty manager suggested, for example, '*instead of creating more transparency this bunch of bureaucracy makes us lose sight of what is really important'*. Similarly, one of the operatives remarked, *'all these boards are a distraction; they are just noise to us*'. These statements flipped the sense of Lean from something aligned with efficiency to an impediment to efficiency.

Despite a range of ironic protests to the boards and charts, senior management extended the VCM system, most notably by installing a green and red *'traffic light'* system in the War Room to indicate whether production was running smoothly. For production manager Steve, however, the system failed to account for the *'human response*' to such innovations:

> *'This red light stuff is complete shit. It's crazy. If there's a serious problem, of course we'll speak to the senior manager, or maybe even to the MD and solve it. But if people see the red light, they just run away because they don't want to have any more work to do or to deal with trouble. We all know what's going on'*.

The examples discussed above render explicit the inferred contradiction between generic Lean tools, such as SOP and VCM, and the specific skill sets of print workers. For shopfloor operatives, their complex and situated work practices were completely at odds with the Lean

mandate for greater standardization. Lean production was thus not so much about improving performance as the exact opposite. Increasingly Lean manifested itself at PrintCo as an ideological system of domination – one that was resisted by irony to reveal underlying contradictions and paradoxes and specifically to unmask the dysfunctional nature of management's strategic aims and claims. The interplay between the manifestation of Lean as an ideological system of domination and the related manifestation of ironic resistance against the initiative suggests an increasing gap between Lean theory and shopfloor reality.

Lean as Fantasy: Resistance through Scorn

At the level of ideology, irony worked to contrast the principles of Lean with alternative prescriptions of how to manage and operate. In particular, irony became tied to entrenched arguments over whose knowledge was more appropriate: that of senior management or the shopfloor. Nevertheless, it also became evident that while such interpretations required the 'truth' of Lean to matter, our observations suggested managers often failed to treat the Lean concept with the expected depth of seriousness. Rather, management often seemed to use Lean to create an illusion of exercising domination over the shopfloor. In this view – Lean as *fantasy* – the programme no longer required depth of belief, only adherence to a shared submission to authority. In practice, this focus on the construction of authority marked a shift away from irony and toward another shopfloor expression – resistance through contempt, and in particular via means of scorn. In the analysis which follows, scorn is conceptually an action expressing the attitude of contempt (Gottman, 1993) – it refers specifically to strategic responses generated by workers' contempt for the actions of senior management, as we now explain.

During the period of Lean implementation, the theme of realizing greater 'order' in the factory began to resonate widely. This theme was nowhere better emphasized than in the promotion of the Lean mantra: *'a place for everything and everything in its place'*. One instance

at PrintCo involved the new senior engineering manager deciding to *'set an example'* by tidying his office in an exaggerated way, a process that included designating spaces for visitors' chairs with yellow floor tape, with each space given a label thus: *'Visitor Chair 1; Visitor Chair 2'* (Figure 5).

Insert Figure 5 about here

This hyperbolic insistence on order, which had no conceivable effects on efficiency, became the subject of much scornful commentary on the manager's actions, leading to responses that he was taking Lean to *'absurd proportions'*. In the case of the chairs, the lack of rationale and seeming disdain for explanation went further, suggesting that even ideology, with its reliance on hidden truths, was being undermined by this senior manager's actions. Reflecting many similar bawdy and gendered remarks, making explicit the shopfloor's contempt for senior management during the Lean implementation period, one duty manager remarked of this event, '*Did you see his office – this cunt should put lines on his fucking bed showing where he can shag his fat wife'*. Such comments were typical of many used to respond to pretentions to managerial control under the Lean programme – deploying coarse and scornful language to deprecate managers whose insistence on Lean seemed to defy argument or justification; a fantasy world of organization disconnected from the stark realities of shopfloor operations.

Another development in the Lean adoption process saw duty managers required to work overtime to complete reports in line with the *'Lean transparency mandate'*. Commenting on this practice, one duty manager suggested heatedly that *'pie chart management'* was being implemented *'just for the sake of it*'. Rather than simply promoting what the shopfloor perceived to be a flawed production philosophy, senior management's advocacy of Lean became more the maintenance of organizational fiction, and worse yet, a fiction taking scant

regard for the underlying realities of factory work.

Much contempt among shop-floor workers was evident during a specific incident of managerial recruitment. In the period leading up to the procurement of some new presses, three key senior managerial positions became vacant: Press Hall manager, post-press manager, and engineering manager. The MD argued that the successful candidates must have *'experience in implementing Lean practices in a production environment*'. The duly recruited Press Hall manager, Ashley, was officially introduced as having '*substantial experience in implementing Lean production in the automobile industry'*. Ashley was 27 years old, the youngest person to occupy the position of Press Hall manager at PrintCo and the first without previous experience in newspaper printing. PrintCo suggested his official managerial *'mission'* was to '*successfully implement Lean in the Press Hall'*.

Many employees however considered Ashley's appointment to be a travesty – one that generated considerable controversy. The focus on Ashley's so-called 'experience' seemed too flagrant an exaggeration to be taken seriously – considering that, for the shopfloor at least, it was *Ashley* who was without the necessary experience for such a vital position. One of the duty managers summarized the concerns:

> *'He's too young and hasn't any printing experience, and this is very bad. The Press Hall is a department that is very much based on fire-fighting techniques. So, okay, we can adopt some Lean production methods in some aspects of the Press Hall, but not to all aspects … And if the right decisions aren't made, especially at this time for the business, with the new investment, then we could be looking at problems'.*

Instead of the ostensibly 'human relations' approach advanced in PrintCo communications on Lean, when dealing with shopfloor workers Ashley was perceived as adopting a very antagonistic management style. For example, following a night shift during which the operators on a new press sent out some bad copies, he decided to discipline the individuals involved – yet

far in excess of that normally applied in such circumstances. During the disciplinary meeting, Ashley reportedly told the operatives concerned that, in future, they should be wary of their actions because *'I am the new sheriff in town'*. The insinuation was that Ashley's appointment signalled a new era of managerial dominion on the shopfloor – one buttressed firmly by the Lean mandate he had received from the company.

News of this meeting spread. The next morning, a number of posters on the theme of the '*new sheriff*' appeared in various locations of the Press Hall (Figure 6). Surprisingly, none of the production or duty managers took them down. Indeed one of the production managers – one respected across the factory – gave one of the posters to the fieldworker, making the following joke: *'Have you seen Ashley? He's wanted!'* (Figure 6, illustration 2 – caption reads, *'Wanted for skipping Primary School to try and manage a Press Hall*'). Three days later, after Ashley personally removed the posters, more were placed on shopfloor boards and walls, reinforcing the fantasy of the *'new sheriff'*. Over the months that followed, the level of contempt escalated, with staff playing music from *westerns* on the Press Hall loud speakers, while Bob Marley's song *I Shot the Sheriff* became a popular ringtone on workers' mobile phones. Some staff even started to wear star-shaped badges on their uniforms and commonly substituted the phrase *'the sheriff*' for the Press Hall manager in conversations. Over time, the fantasy of the new Press Hall manager as 'the sheriff' became symbolic shorthand for changes the shopfloor considered counter to improving performance.

Insert Figure 6 about here

The operatives, in this way, deployed a range of scornful strategies to show their contempt for Ashley – principally by belittling him personally and thus destabilizing his bid to display authority. Ashley's perceived lack of experience, together with his attempt to employ 'hard-

line' management, resulted in an open display of disdain from workers. In the process, the Lean mandate underpinning Ashley's position itself became part of an organizational fantasy – one in which scorn was directed at the exercise of power masquerading as authority.

Shortly afterwards, the 'new sheriff' theme re-emerged after Ashley fired one of the duty managers, Sam Smith – someone with many years of printing experience and who had harboured ambitions to be Press Hall manager. Ashley announced that Smith was fired because in the *'new era'* he was *'surplus to requirements'*. Conjecture in the Press Hall, however, suggested that the decision stemmed from Smith having regularly challenged Ashley over Lean initiatives in production meetings.

There were unforeseen consequences to Smith's sacking. Having worked in the industry for more than 20 years, Smith had built up a considerable number of contacts, notably suppliers, and firing him meant Ashley would be faced with reconstructing this network. To make matters worse, upon departure, Smith refused to give Ashley his 'contacts book'. As news of this spread, workers produced further mocking images of Ashley and posted them on the presses, walls and notice boards. One, for example, offered an image of Smith, a key opponent of the Lean implementation, with an arrow in his back and being threatened by a gun as 'the sheriff' made a last ditch attempt to obtain the contacts book (Figure 6, illustration 3). Such artefacts reinforced the incongruity both of Ashley as an authority figure and Lean as effective practice. Implicitly, the image of Lean as representing a form of utopian management was replaced by one of dystopian authoritarianism.

Additionally, Ashley's pursuit of the *'Lean agenda'* saw him promote values of *'cleanliness'* and *'order'* on the shopfloor In the name of *'hygiene'*, he discarded as *'unnecessary'* a stuffed toy bear that had come to be considered the Press Hall mascot. This again caused shopfloor indignation. As a result, more 'sheriff' jokes were made and posters

created, signifying Ashley's inability to understand the culture and symbolism of the Press Hall. Making explicit his contempt for Ashley, one of the press team leaders remarked at the time:

> *'The sheriff might hold a bachelor's in management degree and went to a fucking business school where he learned all that shit. But quality and modern manufacturing tools are half good sense and half bollocks anyway. It (Lean) is useless. Even the new presses don't need it'.*

During the period of Lean adoption, therefore, various expressions, images and artefacts were used to express resistance to 'the sheriff' and his claims to authority. By association, these phenomena were used to frame Lean as ineffective, futile or – to quote the emerging shopfloor shorthand – *'sheriff bullshit'*. The scorn expressed in the popular shopfloor fantasy of 'the sheriff' had become inextricably linked with the new production philosophy and its claims to enhancing PrintCo's efficiency.

Such reactions were not directed exclusively at Ashley, but more widely at those seen as leveraging workplace domination via Lean. Indeed, the advocacy of Lean was associated with one individual above all – Robert, the tall thick-set senior production manager. Robert articulated Lean in the face of much shopfloor criticism. Although generally treated with greater respect than Ashley, it was Robert who, more than anyone else at PrintCo, promoted Lean as revolutionary and heralded the programme's imminent success.

Not long after installing many of the Lean activities at PrintCo, Robert announced his intention to leave to join another industrial operation. At his farewell party, members of the Press Hall decided to mark the occasion by presenting him with a 'gift' in the form of a collage. A parody of a newspaper page, this comprised a picture of Robert taken during a War Room meeting together with a number of faux news items on the various Lean ideas he had promoted at PrintCo (e.g., 5-S; Ishikawa; kaizen; kanban; single minute exchange of die: Figure 7). When Robert received the gift – arguably a far milder expression of contempt than those directed at

Ashley – he remarked, '*At last, I now know what you think of me'*. Developing this fictional representation of one of the main architects of Lean offered one means by which shopfloor operatives could 'return the favour' (Courpasson & Vallas, 2016, p.3) in respect of the negative feelings they had experienced during the Lean implementation process.

Insert Figure 7 about here

In the examples above, criticism was directed away from practical or pragmatic questions of how to run a Press Hall, towards a more general questioning of the exercise of managerial control under new organizational initiatives. At the core of these messages was resistance aimed at disparaging the actions of senior managers mandated with putting Lean into practice. Such ridiculing was aimed at causing their actions or proposals to be viewed variously as absurd, pretentious or trivial in formulation – as fantasies of domination to be countered with contempt and scornful resistance.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Domination and resistance went hand in hand at PrintCo. However, beyond simply responding to each other in practical or symbolic ways, actors engaged in multi-layered responses in which resistance manifestations expressed tacit presumptions about domination: Coercive features of Lean as sociotechnical were met with responses of practical resistance; interpretations of domination as ideological manifestations were met with resistance based on ironic discourses; and when these discourses were seen as lacking legitimacy, they were read as fantasies of authority, generating contempt from workers and prompting scorn to be directed at the agents of domination rather than their ideologies.

Our analysis of how resistance efforts respond to heterogeneous interpretations of domination responds to Courpasson and Vallas' (2016) call for building on and expanding theorizing around workplace resistance in important ways. Current debates concerning the micro-politics of resistance recognize that domination takes multiple forms and that seemingly innocuous activities – such as expressions of humour (Collinson, 1988; 2002) or even apparent compliance (Ekman, 2014; Ybema & Horver, 2017) – can possess potential for resistance, notably in response to increasingly covert forms of organizational domination. The insight that these different resistance forms respond to different perceptions of domination (Hodson, 1995) opened a sphere of micro-politics that was invisible to traditional perspectives. Above all, it offered a mode of analysis consistent with Foucault's work on micro-power (e.g., Foucault, 1975) and the co-production of domination and resistance (Foucault, 2004). This insight has prompted a rich literature around micro-resistance in the workplace (cf. Knights, 2016).

However, the focus on forms of covert domination has led to difficulties interpreting the nature of domination and resistance because, in any given organization, several plausible manifestations of domination can overlap in relation to the same strategic policy, leading to debates about 'real' resistance as opposed to that which may be 'symbolic' (Fleming & Sewell, 2002), 'co-opted' (McFarland, 2004) or 'decaf' (Contu, 2008). Our study suggests ways of untying this theoretical knot – not only by considering the co-production of domination and resistance, but also by suggesting how this co-production responds to the heterogeneity of imagined forms rather than to a single 'real' form. While such heterogeneity can lead to inconsistent lines of resistance, it nevertheless reflects the complex and multifaceted nature of work organization, which may even contain contradictory ways of understanding domination. Studying resistance empirically involves tracing how dynamics of domination and resistance respond to one another and also how they relate to various levels of analysis. It also suggests that what is considered 'effective' resistance at each level might be distinct – for a more nuanced

approach links the type of effectiveness to the manifestations of resistance involved. Rather than assessing effectiveness from an external vantage point, we explore how different aims of resistance efforts characterize their responses to perceived forms of domination. This conception considers organizational politics as emanating from overlapping power struggles at different analytical levels.

In comparing irony and contempt in relation to sociotechnical resistance, our study complements and extends discussions of the relationships of practical and symbolic resistance (e.g., Brimeyer el al., 2004). However the contribution it seeks to make is greater than this, for while irony has been studied variously as a response to contradictory messages (Hatch, 1997; Sewell & Barker, 2006), a mode of coping (Hoyle & Wallace, 2008) and a medium of resistance (Brimeyer, et al, 2004; Fleming & Spicer, 2003), discussions of contempt – and thus manifestations of scornful behaviour – have been very scarce in the management and organizations literature. Indeed, this is so even though, as Pelzer (2005, p.1221) reminds us, contempt represents a significant 'weapon in the social fight for dominance'. Introducing scorn allows the role of irony – as 'epistemic' resistance (Medina, 2012) involving contested meanings – to come into view, in contrast to a more basic focus on anti-authoritarian mockery (Fleming & Spicer, 2003). While various forms of symbolic resistance are often conflated as variants of a theme – e.g., parody, satire, irony (cf. Cooper, 2005; Terrion & Ashforth, 2002) – we find scorn and irony reflect distinct moments in responding to attempts at managerial domination, with the former centred around practices of epistemic contestation and the latter focused on the decentring of personal authority (Lee & Kats, 1998; Rockwell, 2006). Irony, in short, can degrade into scorn just as the discourse of authority can degrade into that of 'the sheriff'.

The analysis of scorn as a response to a fantasy component of domination is therefore a relatively unexplored area within the literature on domination and resistance. Organizational

scholarship (e.g., Bloom & Cederstrom, 2009; Duncombe, 2012) has noted the fantasmatic element of neoliberal organizations, indicating that notions of economic rationality do not simply operate in terms of objective interest, but rather contain a utopian or fetishistic element – one that forms an object of desire. For instance, Bloom and Cederstrom (2009) argued that neoliberalism expresses a fantasy of market rationality invoking images of boundarilessness and flexibility. Such fantasies thus promise enjoyment and a sense of fulfilment independent of their economic incentives. Similarly, Duncombe (2012) interrogated resistance movements that no longer criticize fantasy but attempt to work 'from within' fantasy to displace its effects. The 'spell' of Lean (McCann et al, 2015) – that its discourse could work against the grain of its practical effects – is consistent with a view of Lean as ideology in the sense that it involves a fantasmatic component. It goes beyond ideology, however, because it suggests that debunking gestures are appropriate when adherence to an ideological vision is lacking. For instance, where domination has taken the form of a not-so-subtle assertion of power then scorn, as an expression of contempt, appears to be a more appropriate means to counter that power.

The difference between irony and scorn, although new to the literature, is important in light of scholarship showing the banalization or even the ideological use of disbelief as reinforcing domination (e.g., Contu, 2008; Endrissat et al, 2015; Sloterdijk, 1988). Similar to what Zizek (1989) termed 'ideological disidentification', managers can cynically implement policy with no real belief or concern that it will work, in situations in which domination operates not through rhetorical persuasion but through draining the ability to effectively act by sowing cynicism (cf. Fleming and Spicer, 2003). Contempt expressed as scorn operates precisely by abandoning the terrain of belief and directing ridicule specifically at the agent of implementation, rather than the message. The more general conclusion is that the meaning and effectiveness of any given manifestation of resistance should not be considered in the abstract but against other aspects from which it distinguishes itself.

In this analysis, manifestations of domination and resistance – and their constitution across different arenas – contribute to understanding Lean by developing the insight of McCann et al (2015) that Lean can be approached from different analytical standpoints, such as the sociotechnical, ideological or fantasmatic. We have argued that while an extensive literature has documented reactions to the implementation of Lean, we go further in systematizing approaches, showing their relational implications and couching them more broadly within a theory of domination and resistance. Additionally, although previous literature has suggested the 'hollowing out' of work under Lean (Delbridge et al, 2000) or illustrated ideological aspects of Lean in the workplace (McCann et al, 2015; Stewart et al, 2016), such unidimensional treatment can overlook how the philosophy functions in numerous ways within a given setting. Understanding organizational policies as operating at different levels of analysis provides a clue to the heterogeneity of domination and resistance, holding these levels as analytically distinct but also as co-existing within the workplace.

CONCLUSIONS

The above arguments, in sum, suggest that different manifestations of domination and resistance can occur simultaneously in respect of a given policy. These manifestations are emergent, situated and concurrent; thus, rather than applying generic categories mechanically, our approach suggests ethnographic fieldwork is necessary to determine how different levels of resistance manifest themselves in workplaces on the ground. That said, what are the implications for organizational theory and practice around Lean and similar policies?

One implication is for the need to understand how domination and resistance link up (or fail to do so) across different forms of practice. It is possible that the practical, discursive and fantasmatic levels of domination and resistance are theoretically linked; for instance, Mumby (2005) describes these as 'dialectically' related. Seeing them as such would suggest that moving

from ‘practical’ to ‘discursive’ visions of Lean involves recognizing Lean discourse as a type of false consciousness – a breach between the reality of Lean and its discursive representation (Dankbaar, 1997; McCann et al, 2015). Viewing Lean as subjective discourse rather than objective fact requires taking a reflexive distance that allows criticism (Boltanski, 2011). Similarly, to question the efficacy of discourse itself as a fantasy – revealing, for example, hidden domination in narcissistic claims of authority – arguably moves us one reflexive step beyond concepts of false consciousness.

Exploring such links is important because in practice, claims of ineffective of ‘decaf” resistance might arise when considering certain resistance manifestations (e.g. ironic responses to ideological domination) from the vantage point of a different manifestation (e.g. practical resistance to concrete domination). The practical question, put simply, is whether workers manifesting resistance in these different ways are aligned in their efforts, or whether these are at counter-purposes. Important debates in critical theory over the material versus symbolic nature of domination (e.g. Fraser & Honneth, 2003), for example, have focused precisely on the question of whether symbolic resistance has taken the steam out of more direct forms. Our approach is to shift this somewhat intractable debate by demonstrating the plurality of ways that a single situation can be rendered in terms of domination and resistance, and to cast such renderings as themselves an object of organizational politics.

Having explored how domination and resistance mutually respond at each level, the ultimate goal would be to then show to what extent different levels entrain each other dialectically – reflexively building on each other to produce heterogeneity in how actors occupy different critical positions (Boltanski, 2011). Such a story makes intuitive sense: at the sociotechnical level, actors can understand domination through coercive technologies and respond with direct and practical resistance, e.g., working-to-rule, explicit protest, or other forms of disruption. Moving to the level of ideology, actors may perceive duplicity in the

workplace and react with irony and similar critical comments, for example, to reveal contradictions in policy and practice. And at the level of fantasy, actors can view discourses as meaningless screens for managerial domination and react with scornful contempt, for example, to debase the authority of the 'boss'. Related dialectically, each level would set up possibilities at the next. By what pressure points one form of struggle becomes transfigured into the next, or becomes caught in a compulsive repetition of the same, is an area to be further explored.

Practically speaking, because different strategies can reflect different moments of struggle, organizational actors face the challenge of organization action within a field of heterogeneous approaches. The practical is not replaced by reflexive ironic critique; rather, the latter builds upon and adds nuance to the former. Similarly, resisting fantasy may suggest the unveiling and disclosure of irony – yet it moves past these practices by emptying the ideological of substance and reverting to scorn. In going beyond essentialist divisions between symbolic and practical struggles, we suggest that each may constitute moments of an ongoing worker-management dynamic. What is considered 'effective' resistance at each level might be distinct. Rather than asking about the 'effectiveness' of resistance, then, the practical question would be how to uncover in the myriad of different resistance forms the thread of organizational discontent running through them, although those forms may seem at times to run at cross-purposes. For instance, resistance at the sociotechnical level might focus on direct opposition such as work stoppages, while ideological resistance would emphasize effective rhetoric or critique, and resistance to fantasy, on 'putting the boss in his place' through mockery or scorn.

Thus, our analysis does not presuppose tactical alignment of resistance strategies, and may even suggest opposing action tendencies. Yet, for the shopfloor workers, practical consequences of domination and resistance were felt at all levels –jobs were threatened and practical sanctions imposed even as ideological and fantasmatic tactics were deployed. In this sense, the emergence of ideology and fantasy as faces of resistance represent not challenges to

but higher-order genres of practical struggle. Ideology and fantasy may be seen by some as distracting attention from practical struggles by emphasizing abstract discourses and imaginary fantasies. How these different aspects of struggle work together, though, is a continuing puzzle, in need of further theory and empirical exploration. Aligning resistance efforts across levels could provide the basis for effective resistance movements; yet the specificity of each kind of resistance is important for responding to different kinds of domination. In this way, exploring the conditions necessary for the co-existence, and possible alignment, of different form of resistance may constitute an important area for future management and organizational research.

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