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## **Managerial work in a practice-embodiment institution – The role of calling, the virtue of constancy.**

### ABSTRACT

What can be learned from a small scale study of managerial work in a highly marginal and under-researched working community? This paper uses the 'goods-virtues-practices-institutions' framework to examine the managerial work of owner-directors of traditional circuses. Inspired by MacIntyre's arguments for the necessity of a narrative understanding of the virtues, interviews explored how British and Irish circus directors accounted for their working lives. A purposive sample was used to select subjects who had owned and managed traditional touring circuses for at least 15 years, a period in which the economic and reputational fortunes of traditional circuses have suffered badly. This sample enabled the research to examine the self-understanding of people who had, at least on the face of it, exhibited the virtue of constancy. The research contributes to our understanding of the role of the virtues in organizations by presenting evidence of an intimate relationship between the virtue of constancy and a 'calling' work orientation. This enhances our understanding of the virtues that are required if management is exercised as a domain-related practice.

Keywords: MacIntyre, Practice, Virtue, Calling, Constancy, Circus

## **Introduction**

What can be learned from a small scale study of managerial work in a highly marginal and under-researched working community? This paper uses the 'goods-virtues-practices-institutions' framework to examine the managerial work of owner-directors of traditional circuses. Inspired by MacIntyre's arguments for the necessity of a narrative understanding of the virtues, interviews explored how British and Irish circus directors accounted for their working lives. A purposive sample was used to select subjects who had owned and managed traditional touring circuses for at least 15 years, a period in which the economic and reputational fortunes of traditional circuses have suffered badly. This sample enabled the research to examine the self-understanding of people who had, at least on the face of it, exhibited the virtue of constancy. This paper uses the evidence of these interviews to suggest an intimate relationship between this virtue and a 'calling' work orientation. The research contributes to our understanding of the role of the virtues in organizations by presenting evidence of an intimate relationship between the virtue of constancy and a 'calling' work orientation. This enhances our understanding of the virtues that are required if management is exercised as a domain-related practice.

The paper proceeds in four parts. In Part One we briefly recapitulate the argument for seeing good management as a type of practice, one whose purpose is the maintenance of institutions in which the external goods of money, success and power are pursued in order to achieve goods internal to the particular practices pursued within an institution (Moore 2005, Beadle and Moore 2006). In Part Two we review the results of research on work orientation to suggest a relationship between the notion of 'calling' and the virtue of constancy. In Part Three we use the findings of the life-history interviews to illustrate the notion of a calling to managerial work. Part Four draws conclusions.

### **Part One: Virtues, Goods, Practices and Institutions**

Evidence of the relationship between virtue and performance is accumulating. Inspired by the positive organizational scholarship movement studies have reported relationships between the virtues of leaders and team performance (Palanski et al 2011), between organization – level virtues and organizational performance (Cameron, K.S., D. Bright and A. Caza 2004; Chun, R. 2005; Bright, D., K. Cameron and A. Caza, 2006) and between individual level character strengths and a range of outcomes including increased life-satisfaction (Park et al 2004), organizational citizenship (Rego et al 2010), affective commitment (Rego et al 2011) and student performance in assessment (Peterson and Park 2006) to name but a few.

Whilst these studies provide significant empirical support for claims made by both positive psychology and virtue ethics about the utility of virtue for the achievement of goods, researchers inspired by Alasdair MacIntyre's 'goods-virtues-practices-institutions' framework (Moore and Beadle 2006) argue that the relationship between the pursuit of excellence and of organizational success is more complex. Whilst the virtues are always required for the achievement of human excellence their relationship to the achievement of organizational goods is contingent upon the purposes pursued by the organization. This casts doubt on any simple assertion of a relationship between the presence of virtue and organizational

success. Indeed as Bunderson and Thompson's (2009) study of the 'calling' work orientation of zoo-keepers has demonstrated, we have strong reasons to believe that employees' commitment to particular goods (in this case the welfare of animals) may provoke suspicion towards the institution. Bunderson and Thompson do not consider whether zoo-keepers' suspicion is a feature of the same virtues that enable them to be good zoo-keepers. However the relationship between commitment to the pursuit of genuine excellence and the pursuit of organizational goods is a preoccupation of MacIntyrean organizational analysis. Why so?

For MacIntyre, claims to the achievement of excellence in products and performance are only intelligible within the context of an ongoing socially co-operative activity whose standards develop over time (MacIntyre 2007 [1981], p.194). These activities are labelled as practices in MacIntyre's oft-cited definition of practice as:

"[a]ny coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended." (MacIntyre 2007 [1981], p.187)

The standards that define excellence within particular branches of science, arts, sports and productive crafts have their own histories – histories which are always those of achievement but also of failure, frustration and conflict. These histories are also those of the institutions that provide the settings for such work, but the achievement itself is to be judged by standards independent of those of their settings. So for example Joseph Swan's invention of the incandescent light bulb is an achievement in the history of industrial chemistry quite independent of its role in the development of the Swan Electric Light Company.

On the MacIntyrean account virtues are required for the achievement of goods internal to practices for three distinct types of reason. First, for practices to develop over time, relationships between practitioners must be informed by the virtues. It is only where relationships exemplify such virtues as courage, justice, wisdom, temperance and just generosity (MacIntyre, 1999) that practitioners will be able to engage in the type of practical reasoning that enables the standards of excellence to be agreed, determines how they might be taught, evaluates the progress made by apprentices, enables comparison between their products and so on. Thus, students must exercise the virtue of humility in order to learn from teachers (MacIntyre 2007 [1981], p.190, MacIntyre 1990, p.92), gatekeepers must apply standards justly when determining entry to their communities of practitioners (MacIntyre 2007 [1981], p.192) and their shared deliberation must observe the precepts of natural law (MacIntyre 2009, Velasquez and Brady 1998).

Secondly individual practitioners must exercise virtues such as diligence, temperance and fortitude to develop the technical skills that are required by every practice (MacIntyre 2007 [1981], p.193, Crawford 2009). Artistic, sporting, professional and craft-work provides examples aplenty of such virtues - the attention to detail of artists, accountants and actors,

the resilience of nurses in military hospitals, the dexterity of circus acrobats, the persistence of mechanics and members of corps de ballet, the courage of downhill skiers.

Thirdly, the virtues are required to create and maintain the institutions which provide practices with the resources without which they cannot continue. However inasmuch as practices are ordered towards the achievement of internal goods, so institutions are:

“characteristically and necessarily concerned with ... external goods. They are involved in acquiring money and other material goods; they are structured in terms of power and status, and they distribute money, power and status as rewards. Nor could they do otherwise if they are to sustain not only themselves, but also the practices of which they are the bearers. For no practice can survive for any length of time unsustained by institutions. Indeed so intimate is the relationship of practices to institutions – and consequently of goods external to the goods internal to the practices in question – that institutions and practices characteristically form a single causal order in which the ideals and creativity of the practice is always vulnerable to the acquisitiveness of the institution, in which the cooperative care for common goods of the practice is always vulnerable to the competitiveness of the institution. In this context the essential feature of the virtues is clear. Without them, without justice, courage and truthfulness, practices could not resist the corrupting power of institutions.” (MacIntyre 2007 [1981], p.194).

The tension between the achievement of goods internal to practices and the external goods required by the institutions that house them is the central feature of MacIntyrean organisational sociology (Moore and Beadle 2006). Cases vary widely between practice – embodying institutions (MacIntyre 1994, p.290) in which wise leadership (Schwartz and Sharp 2010) attends to the sustainable achievement of goods internal to practices and those in which virtue requires courageous resistance to vicious purposes (Conroy 2010). Where institutions have corrupted practices, resistance may be manifest in some cases by the establishment of alternative institutional forms (Krogh et al 2012), in others by whistle-blowers (Beadle and Moore, 2011) or by trade unionists and community organisers (MacIntyre, 2008) as:

“The virtues which we need in order to achieve both our own goods and the goods of others ... only function as genuine virtues when their exercise is informed by an awareness of how power is distributed and of the corruptions to which its use is liable. Here as elsewhere in our lives we have to learn how to live both with and against the realities of power.” (MacIntyre 1999a, p.102)

As Kempster et al (2011) have recently argued, institutional leaders are pivotal to the practice-institution relationship not only in their decisions and their establishment of decision-making processes but also in the institution’s own sense-making around purpose. Krogh et al’s (2012) example of the impact of MIT’s decision to license code to commercial organization provides one illustration. The response to a managerial decision which contravened the purpose of the work as understood by many of the practitioners who undertook it was the creation of the Free Software Foundation as an “institutional alternative to the firm ... to preserve free access to software developed by people who shared the

virtues of the social practice" (Krogh et al 2012, p.665). As this example illustrates, the virtues and vices of institutional leaders impact significantly on the purposes pursued by the institution and how these purposes are understood.

In this context MacIntyre's condemnation of the failure of modern management to resist the corruption of practices has been trenchant (MacIntyre 1977a, 1979, 2007 [1981]). For MacIntyre, the context-free Weberian manager cannot resist the corruption of whatever practice they are managing. Whilst the accuracy, realism and implications of this diagnosis caused much debate following the publication of *After Virtue* (Brewer 1997, Dawson and Bartholomew 2003, Dobson 1996, 1997, Horvarth 1995, Mangham 1995, McCann and Brownsberger 1990, Wicks 1997), recent MacIntyrean work has considered how to characterize management which successfully balances the claims of internal and external goods (Crockett 2005, Moore 2012). In such practice-embodying institutions management becomes not a context – free ideal type but an embodied activity in which managers pursue the ends of particular practice-based domains (Dunne 2005, Beabout 2012) and in which:

"practitioners' ethical judgements cannot afford to lose sight of the context of practice itself: of the specific kind of purposes, relationships and predicaments that constitute that context." (Hogan 2010, p.91)

Managerial virtue should be understood as involving an ongoing commitment to the pursuit of the goods of *both* practices and institutions in such a way that both are sustained. This has led Beabout to characterize such managerial virtues as domain-related (Beabout 2012). Such close, detailed understanding of the practice-context is essential to the making and sustaining of institutions (MacIntyre 2007 [1981], p.194) and requires, as a necessary condition, the virtue of constancy. Why is this?

The virtue of constancy is implicit in every other virtue for no-one can be accounted virtuous in some particular respect if their acts and dispositions manifest these virtues on some occasions but not others. To be accounted as virtuous our actions "must be persistent, reliable and characteristic" (Annas 2011, p.8) for without the virtue of constancy "all the other virtues to some degree lose their point" (MacIntyre 2007 [1981], p.242). For example, to be considered practically wise is to be one to whom others turn for trustworthy advice whenever such is required (Schwartz and Sharp 2010). We should not confuse constancy, as understood within the virtue tradition, with its emotivist cousins, consistency or reliability. An agent can be consistently or reliably vicious for such dispositions are not necessarily directed towards good purposes. Constancy however is directed to goods and we cannot hope to become any kind of practitioner if we lack the virtue of constancy. As we shall see however our opportunities for the exercise of such constancy are limited by the social structures we inhabit and it is to this relationship that we now turn.

## **Part Two: Constancy and Calling**

The agent who exhibits the virtue of constancy leads a unified narrative life, one in which "the commitments and responsibilities to the future springing from past episodes in which obligations were conceived and debts assumed unite the present to past and future in such

a way as to make of a human life a unity.” (MacIntyre 2007 [1981], p. 242). Commenting on Jane Austen’s characterisation of this unity, MacIntyre continues:

“By the time Jane Austen writes that unity can no longer be treated as a mere presupposition or context for a virtuous life. It has itself to be continually reaffirmed and its reaffirmation *in deed rather than in word* is the virtue which Jane Austen calls constancy.” (MacIntyre 2007 [1981], p.242 emphasis added).

Why can constancy no longer be assumed? In papers drawing on empirical studies of power company executives MacIntyre characterized the compartmentalization of social roles as a modern moral predicament. In our roles as citizens, family members and organizational agents we must accord to known facts quite different valuations (MacIntyre 1977, 1979). What is a significant factor in our decision making as parents, for example the long-term consequences of waste disposal, can play no role in our decision-making as executives in minimising the cost of such disposal. Alongside the impact of such conceptual compartmentalization is its social counterpart in which, as Sennett (1998) has subsequently argued, rapid transitions between contexts undermine long term projects and corrodes our ability to make commitments and be held to account by trusted companions. Their absence makes it easier for us to fool others and ourselves for it denies us the standards that inhere in a single intelligible narrative:

“What kind of narrative may be embodied in a particular human life and therefore what kind and degree of intelligibility that life can possess ... depends both on the activities of particular other individuals and upon the nature and coherence of the social structure inhabited by the agent, as well as upon the individual agent him or herself” (MacIntyre 1987b, p.28)

Whilst many of us can announce virtuous intentions or claim virtuous attributes it is only the test of ongoing active commitment that enables us to distinguish the virtue of constancy from simulacra (MacIntyre 1999). So it was for Austen and so it remains for us. However in order to exercise the virtue of constancy in our work we need both to engage in the types of relationships characteristic of practice – based work and to understand such work as being potentially meaningful (Beadle and Knight 2012). What does this require?

Since the publication of Bellah et al (1985), research into work orientation has found important relationships between the principal goods sought from employment and our evaluation of work outcomes (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin and Schwartz 1997). Research has located largely stable and exclusive orientations towards work as *job*, *career* and *calling*. Job orientation represents a transactional approach to work in which work is regarded as something to be endured for the sake of the resources it provides (Wrzesniewski 2003). Career orientation represents a willingness to sacrifice current desires for the sake of future personal achievement. Calling orientation represents a desire to undertake work for its intrinsic goods and to continue to pursue these goods over long periods of time. It thus provides an example of the virtue of constancy directed towards particular practices. Research suggests that work orientation is indeed stable over time though some empirical research suggests that habituation within pro-social work contexts can encourage the development a pro-social work orientation (Grant 2007, 2008).

Preferences for intrinsic and extrinsic rewards are predictive of a range of affective responses (Demerouti 2006; Kasser and Ryan 1993, 2001; Kau et al 2000, Malka and Chatman 2003). Those with a calling orientation towards intrinsic rewards gain most satisfaction from work (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin and Schwartz 1997) and seek to 'craft' their work to create opportunities for increasing meaningful interactions at the workplace (Wrzesniewski & Dutton 2001, Wrzesniewski 2003, p.305-307).

Recent arguments have however suggested a distinction between those whose calling orientation encourages them to craft whatever work they happen to be doing into something personally meaningful from those for whose calling generates its affect only through undertaking particular work (Hall and Chandler 2005, Pratt, Lepsido and Pradies, forthcoming). Bunderson & Thompson's (2009) research provides evidence to show that zoo-keepers exhibit strong calling orientations toward zoo-keeping and will sacrifice higher salaries and career opportunities to maintain their jobs as zoo-keepers. However many take up other roles in order to support themselves and in these roles theirs is a transactional 'job' orientation.

Calling to a particular role is therefore characteristic of virtuous engagement with practices, the type of engagement which distinguishes those who would maintain their relationship to their practice even in the most testing circumstances. MacIntyre's (1994, p.284-286) contrast between two fishing crews summarises the argument. In one crew members and owners are principally directed to the satisfaction of market demand for fish in order to achieve the goods of wages for crew members and profits for owners. Such crews would abandon the occupation if greater remuneration and profits become available elsewhere. However participation in the practice of fishing can transform the desires of fishermen and motivate the very 'calling' orientation that practitioners require:

"continuing allegiance to one's fellow crew members and to the way of life of a fishing community will therefore not be conditional upon the economic rewards being such as to enable one to satisfy one's individual antecedent desires, those that one brought with one when first initiated into the life of a fishing crew." (MacIntyre 1994, p.286)

Alongside fishing, the other examples MacIntyre cites of virtuous practice-institution combinations commonly lie at the margins of modern economic activity. Despite this, others have applied MacIntyre's framework to enquiries in a number of large-scale work contexts including banking (Van der Ven 2011), oil and gas (Crockett 2005), retail (Moore 2012), health-care (Conroy 2011, Dawson, 2009, Kempster et al 2011), open-source software (Krogh et al 2012) and pharmaceuticals (Kay 1997).

MacIntyre however maintains that the perspective afforded by marginal activities enables us to understand mainstream economic organization in terms of the virtues (MacIntyre 2010a). MacIntyrean research has therefore also addressed marginal contexts such as that of the Lakota Sioux (Nicholas 2012, esp. Ch.4) and indy-media (Salter 2008). Likewise circuses are practice-institution combinations which stand, literally and figuratively, at the edge of the modern economic order (Carmeli 1987, Parker 2011) and within which MacIntyrean



empirical research has already been undertaken (Beadle and Kónyó 2006, Beadle forthcoming) and welcomed by MacIntyre (e.g. MacIntyre 2010b, p.17).

### **Part Three: The lives of Circus Directors**

#### *Method*

On the MacIntyrean account we cannot explain either the maintenance or the corruption of practices and institutions without an understanding of the role played in the former by the virtues and of the latter by the vices. This is however to undertake social enquiry in a way that is quite distinct from that of value-free social science (Achtemeier 1994) and shares much with research methods associated with the hermeneutic tradition which seeks to disclose the narrative self-understandings of agents (Beadle and Moore 2011). It is important that data analysis distinguishes between the subjects' self-understanding and the researchers' interpretive set, in this case that of MacIntyre's 'goods-virtues-practices-institutions' framework. The translation of agents' terms into this set is therefore a preoccupation of MacIntyrean enquiries (Crockett 2008) and strategies have included the use of substitute terminology, for example success substituting for external goods in the questioning strategies of researchers. Whilst none of this resolves the apparent tension between the realist ontology which allows for MacIntyre's conceptual framework to be deployed in interpreting text with methods shared with an anti-realist hermeneutic tradition (though see Beadle and Moore 2011 for discussion), it does ensure that the translation of agents' terms to those of the conceptual framework is rendered explicit and therefore open to critique.

The research project reported here sought to establish the self-understanding of the owner-directors of British and Irish traditional travelling circuses about their work. Given that the test of virtues is not the assertion of agents but their actions the selection of research subjects was pivotal to the validity of the project. A measure of constancy was therefore used to define the sample and a high bar was set to ensure that, like MacIntyre's fishing crews, subjects had persisted with their work over a long period of time.

Of an estimated 40 travelling circuses in Britain and Ireland, the vast majority are privately owned by individuals and families known as Directors. Threshold costs for travelling circuses are relatively low and many circuses begin with little more capital than that with which they tour. Circuses are therefore easily started and easily discontinued as the weather, lack of available pitches, increasing fuel costs and competition from alternative entertainments and other circuses can cause cash crises within weeks of the start of the circus season. Whilst there is no source of authoritative data for the industry anecdotal evidence suggests that circus survival rates are low. What is evident from lists of travelling circuses published annually in 'King Pole', the Circus Friends Association Quarterly, is that few circuses sustain over years, fewer still over decades. Across Britain and Ireland there are no more than ten Directors who have toured circuses for more than a decade. The length of commitment to the life of a circus owner was therefore an appropriate measure both of their effectiveness and of their constancy. A purposive sample comprised six subjects who had been circus owner-directors for at least 15 years and whose mean period of continuous circus ownership and touring exceeded 20 years. This is the first time that circus owner-directors have been

the subjects of an academic paper. Each of these owner-directors is a public figure and well-known within the industry. In assuring individual anonymity considerable caution has been exercised to conceal details that would enable them to be identified, hence the omission of demographics or a numbering system.

Whilst influenced by life-story interviewing (Atkinson 1998), the semi-structured interviews undertaken here were more directive and addressed recollections of becoming circus directors, subsequent learning, management practices and reasons for continuing. To promote communicative validity probing questions were used to elicit concrete examples (Sandberg and Pinnington 2009). Interviews took place in directors' caravans which had the additional advantage of providing visual cues to which the directors referred on a number of occasions (e.g. filing cabinets and photographs of circuses, artists and family members). Interviews lasted for between 45 and 90 minutes and were transcribed with subjects confirming transcripts for accuracy once proper names had been removed. A 'realist' form of template analysis (King 1998) was used to analyse data with coding categories drawn from MacIntyre's 'goods-virtues-practices-institutions' framework.

The analysis that follows begins by considering the distinction between the work of practice and the work of the institution in a travelling circus. This provides a context from which we consider the limits of managerial work in this practice-rich environment. Finally we consider the 'calling' of Circus Directors.

### *Practices and Institutions*

Traditional travelling circuses present a range of practices to a paying audience. These practices centre on acrobatics, comedy and more contentiously, animal performance, each of which contain further sub-divisions within which circus performers define themselves as jugglers, wire-walkers, musical clowns, animal trainers acts and so on. Each of these can be regarded as practices in MacIntyre's sense as each has identifiable internal goods, standards of excellence, exemplars and traditions through which their histories have developed. Each of these practices may be performed in a range of institutional contexts but the development of circus as an institution sustained many, invented some (e.g. the flying trapeze) and continues to provide a context that enables practices to take particular forms. Two directors explained their progress into directorship in precisely such terms. For one, circus provided a context within which his clown troupe could enhance their practice in a way that proved impossible in other contexts:

"Very often we found in theatres that we couldn't do various routines because they either didn't have the necessary wing space or they didn't have height on the flies or too much height on the flies. No two theatres are obviously the same and it occurred to me that if we were working in a circus that there would be many many restrictions but the restrictions would be the same wherever we were ... so we kind of drifted into performing in a tent ... and once you start putting clowns in a tent you become a circus quite quickly really."

For another a career as a zoo-keeper had involved training and presenting animals but by the 1970s, animal performance and interaction was actively discouraged by zoos. This director first joined the circus because:

“I felt as though as zoo director I was actually a jailor and I didn’t want to run an animal Wormwood Scrubs [a British prison] ... having a circus is the only legal way I can work closely with animals because it would be frowned upon in zoos.”

Whilst circuses provide a mode of institutionalization which may be commodious for the practices it houses, the relationship between the goods internal to such practices and the goods pursued by the institution is complex. Every circus director highlighted the tension between the evaluative standards of practitioners which focus on the achievement of goods considered most difficult within the relevant practice and the evaluative standards of the audience upon whose favour circuses depend:

“You can think it’s a fantastic act but if the people are all going out to the toilet there’s something wrong ... that’s really what you’re doing it for, the public.”

According to another director:

“What I think is a good show is not necessarily what the public thinks is a good show ... what I like might be very specialist but you see what I like may be very technical. I know that a forward somersault is harder than a back somersault so I appreciate it but nobody, no member of the public does.”

With rare exceptions such as ‘horsey people’ the declining popularity of circus and its condemnation by animal rights activists has done much to breach the evaluative standards of the audience from those of practitioners:

“So that’s why we have things like the Monte Carlo [circus] festival for excellence judged by its peers but the bread and butter thing that keeps us all alive is not excellence, it’s what the public like ... we are prostitutes selling our art to the public, and it don’t matter actually whether we’re good at it or not; it matters whether we satisfy our clients.”

In this context the market incentives for British and Irish performers to develop excellent acts are undermined alongside the incentives to circuses for hiring them. The practical rationalities (MacIntyre 1987a) of those committed to the internal goods of the practice thus become further removed from those of employers. Nevertheless the circus directors who were the subjects of this research have achieved financial stability over long periods and each agrees that the pre-requisites for this comprise a good show with effective marketing and accessible sites. But if the standards of excellence internal to the practices of the circus arts do not define a good show, how is a good show to be defined?

Directors point to the audience’s experience of the show as a whole as the measure of its quality. Whilst their emphases differ widely they all maintain that quality is judged not by the excellence of particular acts alone but by the quality of lighting and music, the pace of the show, the balance between different types of acts (both in terms of a variety of acts and

variation of the number of artists in each act), levels of customer service, amenities available to customers, reasonable pricing and novelty. The importance of novelty has for example encouraged directors to move from not presenting animal acts (when this was once a novelty) to presenting them (which is now a novelty) with both being justified by their effectiveness in generating external goods.

The production of effective marketing and booking accessible sites provided the initial apprenticeship for two of the directors in this study. Whilst one was later to become the director of his father's circus, the other became a circus director after moving from this institutional work ("the business side of it") to the work of practice. He recalls a conversation with his father when he was first considering taking out a circus of his own:

"he very wisely said 'well you think you know it all but you only know one side of the business, you have never been a performer, you have never really worked with the animals' "

For ten years, both as a performer and later as a director he went on to present wild animals in the ring which:

"gave me a bit of respect from the other artists because they could see that I wasn't simply a manager because it would be very easy for artists to say 'Well what does he know? He's never been in the ring' ... a comment that they might justifiably express"

These extracts indicate both the stability of the distinction between the work of practice and the work of the institution in the narratives of circus directors and some areas of tension that persist between the pursuit of these goods. However conflict between them is reduced by both the exercise of and limits to managerial discretion institutionalised in both contractual relationships and cultural mores.

#### *The limits of managerial discretion*

Much of the managerial discretion exercised by Directors takes the form of 'house rules' that apply within individual circuses and that are determined by Directors and communicated to performers before contracts are signed. Directors regularly expressed the view that whilst performers may be in the ring for no more than an hour each day, they were members of the circus community for twenty four hours. House rules were the rules of the community as a whole and the Directors' right to develop and enforce them was accepted within circuses.

To ensure that rules were observed and to maintain relationships within the circus, Directors emphasized the avoidance of favouritism in their treatment of performers and employees. The expression of the virtue of justice requires directors to exercise other virtues including constancy, temperance in their own exchanges with performers and the courage to enforce rules where these are breached regardless of their relationship with the offender. Examples of house rules included provision of electricity to caravans (performers routinely own and maintain generators to use after the central supply has been turned off for everyone), ensuring that everyone smiles at the audience in the Finale, not spilling water on the audience, not hanging out washing ("my father always used to say you never go to the

Palladium to see the manager's drawers hanging in the foyer"), not playing music after 11pm, not wearing black costumes and matters of hygiene ("my great grandfather sacked [Charlie] Chaplin for not washing before he put his make-up on"). The exercise of justice in the administration of rules both asserted and limited the directors' discretion but within the bounds of that discretion their management style varied considerably with some Directors expressing pride in their personal strength in dealing with performers whilst others emphasized a preference for being gentle and others the need for a family atmosphere.

Whatever their style however and whatever rules they imposed on their show, a second limit on managerial discretion was the physical, contractual and cultural boundary of the ring fence. Once the contract was signed between performers and directors before the circus season began, directors' power over the performers' work in the ring was strictly curtailed. This degree of autonomy in the exercise of their practice distinguishes traditional travelling circuses from other forms of theatrical performance (Lister 2004) and guarantees the autonomy of performers in the creation and expression of their practice. Directors may re-order the presentation of acts, though physical limits such as the need to move mats and props constrain this, and they may give advice and make suggestions to acts but what they cannot do is to order an act to change what it does in the ring.

Even when contracts do not appear, such as in the relationships between the Director and family members on the show, the value placed on artistic freedom of the performer prevents the Director from determining the content of the act. If the Director is also the leader of the act or teaches in the circus school, then it is in the latter capacity that changes can be made in the act. When describing this limit, directors used a variety of justifying reasons including lack of technical knowledge, respect for artists' work and the greater amenability of artists to take suggestions before a circus begins touring:

"We don't change a lot during the season, to be able to change things you have to carry people with you, you can't force it on them and the best time to do that is at the start."

Even if performers made their own changes during the season another director:

"Wouldn't even dream of going to them and saying 'Look don't take something out without my permission first' "

In a context in which contracts are agreed for one touring season at a time and few artists remain with a particular circus for more than two years, this limit to managerial discretion means that the selection of acts and short rehearsal period before the tour are critical if Directors are to achieve their vision for the show. But such limitations to managerial prerogative were accepted as the ongoing and defining condition of being a Director of a circus rather than merely a director of the theatrical display of circus skills.

### *The 'Calling' of Circus Directors*

Looking back over the changes they had experienced in their time as circus directors some improvements had made life easier including the reliability of vehicles, payment facilities, better materials for tents, greater availability of electricity and the provision of machinery to

drive stakes into the ground. All have reduced the hazards and sheer physical labour involved in an organization that moves often and literally, if not metaphorically, constructs and deconstructs itself at each site (Parker 2011). However much else had worsened. The bureaucracy required to run a circus had exploded with changes to the requirement for licenses to be granted by local authorities before every visit, the increasing regularity of checks by health and safety agencies and customs and excise authorities and demonstrations by animal rights activists, bans on the use of local authority grounds for circuses with animals and the declining popularity of circuses were regularly cited. In such an environment why should they continue? When I posed this question one answer dominated, that it wasn't for the money. Some laughed as they said this and cited other work such as tent – making and building horse-boxes that would generate greater income or cite family members who earned more as successful performers in continental Europe. But money, for them, was not the point. The distinguishing characteristic of MacIntyre's (1994) virtuous fishing crew is expressed in this response.

When moving to their positive reasons a series of repeated themes were evident, all of which suggest a self-understanding that falls within the scope of a 'calling' orientation productive of a specific type of enjoyment (Bellah et al 1985, Wrzesniewski et al 1997). Four types of justification are evident: the enjoyment of practice, the goodness of the show, reputation/family tradition and circus as a unique way of life.

The enjoyment of practice was uppermost in the reasoning of one director for whom the circus offers the only institutional environment within which he could maintain his practice of animal training and presentation. When he stopped working in zoos and began with the circus he recalled that:

"I wasn't a very good trainer... I even did silly things that I thought what a good idea I'm going to put two arms in the lions' mouths so I had a lion either side of me held me arms and I couldn't get out (laughs) .. I hadn't worked out how to teach them to let go on cue so I was stuck there for five minutes like Jesus Christ on the cross with a lion clasped on each arm."

Later, the absence of other circuses able and willing to present wild animals meant that his only option was to direct his own show. His life history exhibits constancy in its directedness towards particular goods regardless of the controversy over the ethics of the practice itself. But for others, most of whom no longer perform in the ring, different goods prevail.

As we have seen directors describe what constitutes a good show in different ways but the idea of 'the good show' resonates with them all as the expression of the uniqueness of circus as a form of live entertainment. One director illustrated this through recalling particular incidents which demonstrated the potential effects of circus on the audience, effects unavailable in other institutions:

"I can't overestimate the satisfaction, the absolute satisfaction I get from the public going out of the show and saying 'that's fantastic' and we have had some very nice touching things happen over the years ... where little kids were dying and have sent letters in ... the parents have sent letters in saying you know 'that's the first time

little Jonny has smiled in three years and he's dying of leukemia and you've made him smile' and things like that ... and things like that are very touching because I can't see the kid with leukemia getting the same kick from watching a video or going to the cinema but the fact of our efforts have really made that boy's .. a child's day you know ... to think you can bring so much pleasure into people's lives is ... and this is the truth.. I'm not giving you some bullshit to write in a magazine ... it gives me a lot of pleasure to think that I can do something good for people."

The third type of justification was around reputational goods conferred by other circus people, both directors and performers, rather than by the audience:

"I know this sounds conceited and all the rest of it but everyone's got an ego haven't they? I like it when I go abroad and I get a lot of recognition abroad ... far more than I get in this country ... from other circus people directors, artists, fans ...you know when I go to America or anywhere in Europe I always get treated with tons of respect and tons of honour and that's nice ... I'm not going to overdo it but it's a nice thing to have."

Another director observed:

"When you get other circus people and you know what they're talking about you ... you hear that they're saying like 'that's the show' like 'this is the show to see' "

In cases where directors had inherited their role circuses were named after the family and reputational goods were valued for redounding on the family as a whole. They represented a family tradition and directors intended to pass both their circuses and their reputation to their own children:

"It's important to me because we've kept our name clean all these years and people know us by our name ... they know exactly who we are and I think people ... respect the fact that you use your name and you're not changing."

Another said of circuses that change their name:

"They have all come and gone and they are having to change their name every couple of years ... because they got a quick fix and that's it but through all of them we've just kept our own name and our own standards and ... you know ... we're still doing as good now if not better than the rest of them ... so that's the biggest personal satisfaction is that we've got where we have without any assistance and using our own name ... and we haven't been frightened to put our name up ...you know ... in lights."

The final recurring justification was the role of the director in maintaining the circus itself - a working and travelling community whose history and traditions span centuries and continents. This features not only in the interview data reported here but also in the testimonies of circus directors from previous generations. In 1967 the Circus Director Cyril Bertram Mills wrote:

“Once you have spent a year or two with circuses you become infected with something nobody has ever been able to inspect or define.” (Bertram Mills, 1983 [1967], p.56)

Directors used phrases such as “there is no better way of life”. One tried to capture it in this way:

“Circus to me is a way of life ... It isn't a job ... I always say I've never had a job ... this is my life that I've decided to do and I've decided to do it for all this time ... we work all day to be in that ring ... that's what we do ... All of the building up and pulling down is all because of that ring ... that round thing in the middle there with sawdust ... hallowed ground.”

#### **Part Four – Conclusions**

What can be learned from a small scale study of managerial work in a highly marginal and under-researched working community?

First, the subjects of this research have demonstrated the virtue of constancy through maintaining their circus businesses despite a worsening environment for the industry as whole. Their explanations for such resilience are predicated on the uniqueness of circus as an institution and stated in terms resonant of a 'calling' work orientation. To be intelligible, virtues must be intentional and hence require objects that animate their exercise. Equally to be 'called' is to be called towards something, something of significant, perhaps over-riding value in a person's understanding of the directedness of their lives. This paper, though consistent with the argument that 'calling' is an inherently moral concept (Hall and Chandler 2005, Pratt, M.G., C. Pradies and D.A. Lepisto (forthcoming)) suggests further that calling cannot be realized without another inherently moral concept, the virtue of constancy. Whereas previous research on the calling orientation has focused on non-managerial employees, this paper provides evidence of both calling and constancy amongst business owners or managers. If management is to be exercised as a domain-related practice (Beabout 2012) then the domain in which it is exercised must itself be capable of providing the virtue of constancy with an appropriate object. For the subjects of this research, circus provided exactly this. Future research should examine the role of constancy and calling in other practice-embodying institutions to gauge the range of contexts in which managerial work is so animated.

Secondly, this paper has illustrated the theoretical resources that MacIntyre's work provides for understanding and researching organizations in a way that bridges what are often regarded as separate domains of business ethics and organization studies. The paper has shown that the concepts of practice, of goods internal and external to practices, and of the relationship between practices and institutions, can be meaningfully deployed to interpret textual data.

Third, within MacIntyrean scholarship the role of the manager has remained controversial. If we are to argue that management may be conducted as a practice (Moore 2005, Moore



and Beadle 2006, Beabout 2012) we must be able to specify goods internal to it. This paper suggests that the 'product' of managerial practice in the travelling circus can be seen as the synergies achieved between the practices housed within the institution. The idea of 'the good show' is a synergy of components which may be experienced and evaluated discretely against standards internal to particular practices (e.g. quality of music or lighting) and additional standards apply to the patterned combination of elements that make up the show. This paper provides evidence of significant affective responses both to the goods of particular practices and to these synergistic goods. When directors take pride in the show this is not the external good of status enjoyed for its own sake but recognition of the achievement of goods internal to management as a domain-related practice (Beabout 2012).

It follows that if such goods as 'the good show' are *and can only be* the results of combinations of practices within institutions then it might be sensible to speak of goods internal to institutions themselves. When Philip Astley created the modern circus in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Kwint 2002) his entrepreneurship combined previously disparate practices in a new institutional form and gave rise to the potential emergence of new practices, most famously the flying trapeze. But he also created something with its own goods, traditions and the affective responses and when such institutions began to travel, circus became a form of communal life in which:

The shared making and sustaining of the types of community within which the common good can be achieved – families, farming, households, fishing crews, local forms of political community – are activities which themselves have the structure of practices, within which the same virtues are needed for the achievement of goods internal to those practices as are needed elsewhere. (MacIntyre 1994, p. 288)

MacIntyre's (2008) acceptance of Keat's criticism that the classification of goods internal and external to practices does not exhaust the heterogeneity of goods is consistent with a re-imagining of goods internal to institutions as being the goods of such communities. This notion brings us closer to the prerequisites for management to be exercised as a domain-related practice. The institution should prioritize the achievement of goods internal to the practices it houses; both practices and institutions should be capable of animating a sense of calling; and the virtue of constancy, so clearly evident in the lives of practitioners, should feature also in the lives of those who manage them.

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