

# Critical Management Studies: Lessons from South Africa

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*17 September 2024 | 3:00 PM – 6:00 PM  
Virata School of Business and on Zoom*

*Prepared by Angeli Francesca P. Lacson*



UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES  
CENTER FOR  
INTEGRATIVE AND  
DEVELOPMENT  
STUDIES

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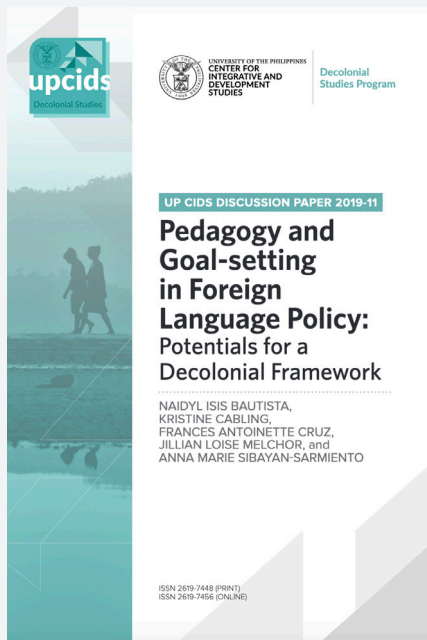
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## About the Proceedings

These proceedings are based on the World Experts Lecture Series (WELS), “Critical Management Studies: Lessons from South Africa” held on September 17, 2024, from 3:00 PM to 6:00 PM at the Virata School of Business and on Zoom. It was organized by the University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS) Decolonial Studies Program (DSP), in partnership with the University of the Philippines Virata School of Business (UP VSB) and the University of the Philippines School of Labor and Industrial Relations (UP SOLAIR).

The lecture aimed to provide an assessment of critical management studies, which provides a lens through which we can ensure more socially just, equitable, and inclusive workplaces. Higher education institutes that train managers need to reflect on the curriculum, values, and practice in educating students of management. The speaker was Dr. Shaun Ruggunan, Professor at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The reactors were Dr. Nassef Manabilang Adiong, Project Leader of the UP CIDS DSP, and Dr. Aliza Racelis, Professor at UP VSB. The documenters of the event were Ms. Shane Belaro and Ms. Angeli Lacson.





# Introduction

The event commenced with an introduction from the moderator, Ms. Thea Flores from the UP CIDS Decolonial Studies Program.

To open the program, Dr. Erik Paolo Capistrano, College Secretary of the UP Virata School of Business , delivered the opening remarks. He emphasized the importance of establishing more collaborations between the units and disciplines of the university. He gave special thanks to everyone who made the forum possible, particularly Dr. Shaun Ruggunan, the UP CIDS DSP, the UP VSB, and the UP School of Labor and Industrial Relations (SOLAIR). This was followed by opening remarks from Dr. Marie Aubrey Villaceran, Convenor of the UP CIDS DSP. She contextualized the forum as a space to reflect on the complex connections between management, power, and decolonial thinking in the context of the Global South. Management in particular has been shaped by global histories of power, including colonialism, which influences how the field is taught, studied, and practiced. Management knowledge and theory is rooted in frameworks and value systems developed in the Global North, often with minimal consideration of the specific needs and realities of those in the Global South. Decolonial approaches to management studies thus ask us to rethink these inherent structures and examine how we might disrupt the colonial legacies embedded in them. In addition to critiquing existing practices and ways of knowing, the forum will also consider the lived experiences that prioritize equity, sustainability, and social justice, with the ultimate goal of promoting alternative knowledge systems and transforming present systems. Dr. Villaceran ended her address with hope that the forum will serve as a starting point for much needed conversation about the role of management education and practice in dismantling oppressive structures.



# The Speaker

## Dr. Shaun Ruggunan

*Professor, School of Management, IT, and Governance  
College of Law and Management  
University of KwaZulu-Natal (South Africa)*

Dr. Shaun Ruggunan began his lecture by discussing two prompts for his work in critical management studies: the political and the personal. Political prompts for study included a new zeitgeist of extreme money and financialization, with discussions on the need to financialize everything. This culminated in the 2008 financial crisis. Given the severity of the 2008 financial crisis, Dr. Ruggunan asked why we should trust bankers and management gurus, given they were not able to predict the crisis—if we thought we had the most qualified policies and people running our global economy, how did we end up in this crisis?

In terms of personal prompts for studying critical management studies, Dr. Ruggunan discussed his shift from sociology to the school of management in 2011, which was closely followed by the Marikana Massacre in 2012. The 2012 Marikana Massacre occurred when miner workers protested gold national mining companies in South Africa. It was the most violent protest in post-apartheid South Africa, and the first time that a new democratic government in South Africa had killed its own workers, proving that the new democratic government was anti-union and anti-worker. At the time, most of the opposition came from fields such as sociology and anthropology. Dr. Ruggunan questioned: where were the public intellectuals in schools of management and business? And why are we not hearing their voices? Following that, the Fees Must Fall campaign was held in South Africa in 2015, where university students shut down universities nationally, protesting for free access to higher education, which was the promise of the post-apartheid state.

Dr. Ruggunan then outlined the three central principles of critical management studies: reflexivity, critical performativity, and denaturalization. In talking about reflexivity, he posed these questions:

- What are my values in life?
- What are my values when I enter the classroom?
- What are the values that I want to impart to my students?
- Do these values conflict with materialism?

Critical reflexivity often raises issues of cognitive dissonance—the values one may hold may be contrary to the values one is trying to teach in their discipline. In essence, critical reflexivity asks us to reflect on ourselves and be our authentic self in the room. He emphasizes that critical pedagogy in practice requires this transformation at both a personal and political level. It operates from the premise that as academics, we operate with a set of values, whether it be implicit or not. Our disciplines are not value free or objective, which may seem to be common sense but is not.

The second principle of critical management studies is critical performativity. This principle challenges the idea of performativity taught in human resource management, organizational psychology, and other business schools. Conventionally, it is held that the fundamental purpose of humans is to work and perform to earn some kind of self-worth, so much so that if one is not performing all the time, one is almost not human. This idea is well-entrenched in the workplace and in all areas of human life. In human resource management, this has translated into the idea that human beings are infinitely resourceful—the idea of skilling and reskilling until you die. Despite current psychological research disputing this, it is still held fast in corporate workspaces. This is something critical management studies deeply challenges.

The idea of constant work and performativity is deeply linked to colonial ideas and practices. Dr. Ruggunan noted an irony in decolonial work in the university, with the decolonial work of individual scholars rewarded in terms of points and rankings. However, the irony is that banking, counting, quantifying, and measuring is the most colonial work of all. Dr. Ruggunan also emphasized that the work of protesting white supremacy is not about

protesting white people, but precisely these kinds of management systems, where productivity becomes the sole measure of worth.

The third principle of critical management studies is denaturalization. Dr. Ruggunan asks us to take, for instance, something we assume to be true in our discipline, and to question:

- Is this true?
- How do we know this will be clear?
- Does it apply to all contexts?

One example of denaturalization is Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which is still taught in most schools and universities. In many cultures, including South Africa, the individual is not as important as the community. Yet in human resource management in South African universities, self-actualization is still taught as the pinnacle of human achievement, even if it does not resonate with the students or make sense in their context. Thus, the need for denaturalization and to make the familiar unfamiliar. At the core of critical management studies is the question of what it means to be human—are we asking this question in disciplines like human resource management, industrial innovation, and business management?

Dr. Ruggunan emphasizes that human resource management should be discussed further in practice. Much of the disciplinary base of human resource management today is based on work done by Elton Mayo. Human resource management has roots in the development of human relations as an alternate response to scientific management. However, when one views the literature, one sees that Mayo engaged in a series of flawed experiments—he was actually responding to a need of J.D. Rockefeller in the United States, who wanted to bypass the strength of trade unions and get into collective bargaining.

Through early design studies, the strangest of which are the Hawthorne Studies, Mayo and Rockefeller, along with Harvard Business School, developed the idea of resources for human relations, and they created the unit for management. The trio of Rockefeller, Mayo, and Harvard Business School was right-wing, undemocratic, anti-labor, and anti-human. Soldiers returning from World War II, many of whom were traumatized from war, were labelled

irrational by Mayo. This irrationality needed to be treated. An idea of Mayo was to construct workers as irrational and in need of management by rational managers. Concurrently, this also created a set of techniques and tools to manage these workers, which was then legitimized as a scientific discipline and as a profession. Over time, this became the systemic knowledge base of human resource management. Management ideas are thus not just a set of techniques but also an ideology that has some appeal to managers providing a rationale for their right to manage.

Michel Foucault argues that those with power—psychiatrists, doctors, prison wardens, teachers, and so on—determine what is normal and what is pathological by controlling the discourse. Managers and management studies, need to be included in the debate about ideology, power, and practice, because management science, like all sciences, is a political project. Mayo's key task was to find a way to answer workers' demands for a voice in management decision making during the interwar period. Thus, he needed to portray workers in such a way to preclude the need for management not to bargain with them, but rather control them. This is where the idea of behavioral psychology enters management studies and resource management.

It is evident how the management curriculum is influenced by certain thought ideas, small experiments, and ideologies. The Harvard Business School and other American universities then began adding human resources into the curriculum. And in 1949, Mayo's book was amongst the top ten books read, and human resources was the most widely subscribed course in most of the states in the United States. This speaks of a need to be critical about management views and popular management fiction.

There is, however, reason to be optimistic about the future of management studies, because human resource management is made to be multi-disciplinary. Where there is multidisciplinary, there is always room for learning, deconstructing, and relearning. Another reason to be optimistic is the role of the non-economic social world. The fact that economic life is embedded in social institutions is something that needs to be conveyed to students. On the topic of Western management practices, Dr. Ruggunan notes that these have become universalized. This can be seen in narratives of Africa, which usually reduce the complexity and enormity of Africa to the pyramids of Egypt.

On language and colonialism, Dr. Ruggunan notes that the vocabulary of decolonialism tends to hinder people from participating in decolonial work because it tends to be obtuse and difficult. Thus, critical management studies and decolonial studies is also a semantic practice—it is about what it embodies and it is affective. When students are excluded of the discourse and debates of decolonialism, it constitutes a re-colonization. It is epistemological violence to prohibit students from participating in debates because they are unaware of the vocabulary of decolonialism. Colonialism itself is a management project—it is the study of supply chains, people, transport, and industrial relations.

On the topic of racialized epistemologies, Dr. Ruggunan observes that psychology, industrial psychology, and management work hand in hand with the apartheid state to legitimize its labor market policies, environmental policies, and industrial relations policies, especially around psychometric testing and the obsession with quantitative work and positivism. He notes that his university is the most racially and class-wise transformed university in South Africa, but that demographic has not changed the ideologies. He asks: does a shift in demographics equate to a shift in ideology? Is it always a question of local textbooks?

Dr. Ruggunan cautions on seeing decolonization as a one-way street. He emphasizes that the decolonial project is not about being anti-Europe, but about protesting these imbalances of power. Decolonialism comes to signify open-ended academic concepts of diverse epistemological criticism and refusal of European modernity along with its capitalist structure and patriarchal underpinnings.

On the topic of business schools, Dr. Ruggunan notes that business schools do not realize how much power they have. Around 70 percent of universities around the world have a business school, and the Master's in Business Administration (MBA) degree is highly valued and holds a considerable amount of cultural capital. Business schools thus export a certain kind of way of doing business and management, which often happens through the accreditation system. The project to continually export American ways of doing business to business schools constitutes a form of colonization, whereby if a business school has the same kind of global accreditation around the world, students are going to be learning the same things. He asks: why are business schools so reluctant to engage in global debate? Is it because business schools often



work in silos, whereas other disciplines tend to collaborate? Is it this idea that business or management knowledge is immutable, right, the objective truth? Or is it a lack of awareness, knowledge of literature, or gatekeeping that prevent people from engaging?

Dr. Ruggunan ends on the note of practical issues. The first is values—he emphasizes the significance of interrogating the values one has in relation to the values of the discipline, and whether it is integrated or not, and how it serves and it does not. The second is content. He asks:

- Why are we teaching?
- Where is the content coming from?
- Do we need to have changes in curriculum, design, and so on?

Dr. Ruggunan also stresses the importance of knowing the history of the disciplines, because it is an entry point for young scholars wanting to do good work. He also notes that assessment is a missing piece of the puzzle, as most assessments are colonial in nature and Westernized. Finally, he mentions the idea of the Somatic—the body—which tends to be undervalued considerably in universities but is essential in doing the work of critical management studies.

# The Reactors

## Dr. Nassef Manabilang Adiong

Dr. Nassef Manabilang Adiong, Project Leader of the UP CIDS DSP, began his reaction by exploring how critical management studies are interlinked with decolonizing management studies, yet distinct from one another. Critical management studies' first tenet on denaturalization is to deliberately make the familiar unfamiliar, to strip away discursive assumptions and common discourses and create cognitive dissonance. The second tenet, anti-performativity or critical performativity, is linked to subversive active intervention into managerial discourses and practices. The third tenet, on reflexivity, means being self-conscious of our values as a human and academic and how one relays or transmits these values. Dr. Adiong asks: in this case, what values do human resource management finance and business offer, then what could the major tenets of a decolonizing management studies look like? Does it also contain denaturalization, critical performativity, and reflexivity as starting elements for decolonizing management studies?

Human resources management is an ideological and political project. It is not just a set of techniques, but an ideology that appeals to managers, providing a rationale for their right to manage. Dr. Adiong commended Dr. Ruggunan for exposing the history of human resources management and its roots in Elton Mayo, the Hawthorne experiments, J.D. Rockefeller, and the Harvard Business School—all of which were right-wing and undemocratic, anti-labor, and anti-human. Mayo, Rockefeller, and the Harvard Business School controlled discourses on human resources and human resource management, which in turn reverberated for decades in business curricula. This means that the same flawed empirical narratives are being repeated and replicated. Another consequence is they advocated for a unitarist system of industrial relations and legitimized the lionization of management, which spread to other disciplines and fields of study as well.

Dr. Adiong stressed the need to decolonize knowledge, disciplines, and fields of study—with management studies in particular. Decolonizing knowledge should be understood as an intellectual process anchored on different aspects and different contexts, such as centering our worldviews to create theories, methods, and research based on local perspectives. Core concepts should be rethought and underrepresented geographies, peoples, and perspectives should be emphasized. These decolonial structures may involve the creation and building of institutions, norms, and scholarly disciplines to replace colonial structures and mitigate the effects of a colonized management studies, which presents numerous challenges as current institutional frameworks are characterized by various forms of dependency on the global core.

Dr. Adiong suggests a range of strategies such as interdisciplinarity in teaching, the promotion of local journals through an interdependent network of institutions, and encouraging homegrown theorizing in our respective classrooms. He also promotes the usage of Indigenous Knowledge Systems, which is a confluence and combination of modern science and local knowledge and experiences. In the Philippines, this would involve critically analyzing concepts, paradigms, and frameworks in management studies to as to offer important insights on the capitalist, exploitative, racialized, and gendered world-making. This would also offer insights on how to undo core-periphery hierarchies and expose a pre-reversal and pluralistic global perspective. This would involve (1) placing history and genealogy at the forefront of interrogating contemporary societal issues, trends, and contexts; (2) validating voices, stories, and literatures of marginal people who hold equal capacity to understand the modern world; and (3) teaching management studies critically to open multiple canons and not revering a single canon over another, entailing the coexistence of multiple knowledge systems.

While Philippine management studies grapples with conventional colonial modernity and upholds the Western canon, we should also acknowledge the multilayered and complex factors that bear upon the interdisciplinarity and multidisciplinary of management studies. A decolonized management studies will give birth to a reimagined management studies discipline that engages with and represents the past, present, and futures of our own local peoples and perspectives that have thus far been marginalized and deprioritized.

# Dr. Aliza Racelis

Dr. Aliza Racelis, Professor of the UP VSB, began her reaction by congratulating Dr. Ruggunan on his presentation and reflecting on Nelson Mandela's profound impact on global human rights and its enduring spirit of forgiveness and unity.

She observes, however, that since the issue of racism is not as prevalent in the Philippines as it is in South Africa, Philippine business schools have taught management in the traditional way—by referring to and utilizing the theories pulled from the history of management thought, namely the consideration of the scientific management era of the 1890s with Frederick Taylor and his scientific management. Afterwards, the review that after World War I, organizational studies shifted focus to how human factors and psychology influenced organization. The identification of the Hawthorne effect played a pivotal role in this transformation.

Next was the movement towards human relations, which emphasized employee cooperation and morale, to the social psychology paradigm of the 1960s, to the more contemporary multicultural analysis imbuing management and organizational behavior. This is why organizational behavior draws insights from psychology, sociology, and anthropology, in examining behavior at micro (individual), meso (groups), and macro (organizational) levels.

Dr. Racelis notes that some of her colleagues have begun imbuing their teaching of management with notions taken from positive psychology of Professor Martin Seligman and colleagues. Since she teaches business ethics and social responsibility, with a particular emphasis on Aristotelian virtues and ethics, she brings ideas of the common good, happiness, and well-being into her management teaching. She uses the philosophical model of virtue ethics, based on Aristotle and the Greek philosophers' notion of eudaimonia, which refers to the condition of human flourishing or of living well. In this philosophical thought, the focus is on character virtues, which are supposed to be universal as they are found in all great faiths and civilizations. In this view, character education is defined as all explicit and implicit educational activities that help individuals to develop positive personal strengths and qualities called virtues.

Increasingly, it is thought that virtues such as practical wisdom, compassion, honesty, self-control, justice, and respect, which contribute to good character, are part of the solution to many of the challenging challenges facing individuals, groups, organizations, and societies today. Those who teach virtue ethics are of the belief that everyone should have the opportunity to develop good character throughout their lives, since the virtues which make up character enable us to enjoy rewarding and productive lives, especially practical wisdom. The more people with good character, the healthier our society. This view is part and parcel of emerging positive psychology.

In the Philippines, this model of management thought and teaching is advocated by the Institute for Integrality and Positivity, Inc., which is a pioneering institute in Asia delivering positive psychology solutions and programs. Dr. Racelis has been introducing these ideas into module topics. As people who know that managers seriously care for their people and share in the belief that people development is the ultimate success formula, the institute thoroughly analyzed key trending challenges in motivation and has put together robust tools, expert knowledge, dynamic processes, and high-impact training and consulting activities that facilitate mindsets and habits leading to wholeness and well-being. The hope is to revolutionize workplaces and communities with positive psychology solutions and create a thriving environment that extends to the larger community. Further evidence for these ideas can be found in the studies by Professor Kim Cameron and his colleagues. In his decades-long research exploring the relationships between organizational virtuousness and performance, he has found significant correlations between virtuousness and both perceived and objective measures of organizational performance.

Dr. Racelis discusses the impact of virtuousness in organizations, outlining two main functions: an amplifying function, which creates self-reinforcing positive cycles, and a buffering function, which helps organizations withstand challenges, such as downsizing. She also highlights the natural inclination of people and organizations to move toward positive, life-enhancing forces, and explains how positive practices lead to improved outcomes in both organizations and personal relationships.

Dr. Racelis introduces the Transcendental Leadership Model, which builds upon transformational leadership by addressing its potential shortcomings,

such as the risk of manipulative behavior. This model emphasizes a service orientation and ethical behavior, promoting unity and fair rewards, while appealing to intrinsic motivation and transcendent goals. The model's core virtues include wisdom, justice, temperance, humility, and magnanimity.

Dr. Racelis also reflects on Mandela's vision for a democratic, harmonious society. He was known to have said, "I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to see realized." She notes its relevance to leadership and management. Mandela's leadership is seen as embodying the virtues of transcendental leadership.

Dr. Racelis concludes by stressing the importance of critical management studies, which encourage ethical, socially responsible management practices, and emphasizes the decolonization of management studies, particularly within the context of teaching in the Philippines.

## **DR. RUGGUNAN'S RESPONSE TO THE REACTORS**

In Dr. Ruggunan's response, he thanked both reactors, as well as everyone who listened and engaged in the forum. He agreed with the reactors' notes on critical management studies, and emphasized decolonization is a long road that requires the work of many people. He also noted that decolonization is a larger problem that affects structures, systems, and worldviews.



# Open Forum

A from the audience came from a teacher from the UP VSB, who focuses on human resources and organizational behavior. The question concerns how students and teachers can conduct the discourse of critical management studies in class, since they are used to using frameworks and theories that originated from the West. How does one confront criticality in contemporary classes?

In his reply, Dr. Ruggunan stated that the first step is to acknowledge that students come from diverse cultural, social, and economic backgrounds. Taking Maslow's hierarchy of needs as an example, the second step is to outline one's recurring motivations—why teachers want to present certain theories and ideas to students—and consider if it makes sense in students' specific contexts. Another method is to create assessments that allow students to do the critical work of writing and reading, which should be followed by a critical reflection. Teachers must present ideas as ideas that can be challenged rather than universal.



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## THE PROGRAM

The **Decolonial Studies Program (DSP)** focuses on the varying dimensions of coloniality/modernity that continue to impact the Global South societies and hinder their institutions from achieving their liberating potential. The term modernity/coloniality is often used with reference to continuing and often deleterious processes, conditions, and altitudes brought about by the colonial period that, Anibal Quijano and Walter Mignolo argue, are inextricably linked to the epistemology of modernity.

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