

# Part I

## Can Management Be a Practice?

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According to MacIntyre, Management is not a practice, in the sense that it is not a 'coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realised' in the pursuit of excellence and the extension of 'human conceptions of good' (MacIntyre 2007, 187). Whether it is the specific question of whether management is a practice, defined in this way, or the more general question of what *is* a practice, many authors in the collection consider this topic.

Geoff Moore begins our book with a detailed argument that management can be considered a practice, by extending MacIntyre's model with the concept of a *secondary practice*, and drawing attention to the role of (senior) management in sustaining the institution in which other practices can take place. Tony O'Malley approaches the question from another direction, assessing management, as described by some of the most respected management writers of the late twentieth century, against the various elements of the MacIntyre definition. Management is, he finds, a coherent and complex form of social activity, socially established and cooperative. It can, and often does, establish standards of excellence and assess achievement against them, and in some enterprises, such as in the visionary or excellent companies of Collins and Porras or Peters and Waterman, the achievement of internal goods is an important element of corporate culture and management responsibility. Management, O'Malley admits, is not a practice when it 'treats ends as given'. MacIntyre (2007, 30) sees all managers in this light, which excludes management from being a practice, but O'Malley points to the existence of companies that are values driven and successful. Where managers seek after good, then management is a practice, he argues.

Whether one takes Moore's view – that there are two practices within an institution – or O'Malley's view – that management is a practice provided that managers seek to do good – it is clear that managers need a range of capabilities if they are to be both virtuous *and* financially successful. The importance of two such capabilities, courage and sound moral judgement, is discussed in the two chapters following the consideration by Moore and O'Malley of the management-as-practice question. There is a movement here to looking at what individuals can do, but it is not a

complete thematic break from the organizational to the individual level. Chris Provis shows that the development of intuitive judgement is greatly aided by social exchange in the practice of management, and Howard Harris shows how courage is developed within communities.

## Reference

MacIntyre, Alasdair. 2007. *After Virtue*, 3rd ed. London: Duckworth