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Expansive and Focused Concepts of Managerialism in CMS

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Abstract

The topic of managerialism has in recent years received significant attention in the critical management studies field. However, this paper proposes that there are largely unrecognized conceptual disagreements hampering progress in understanding the nature of managerialist influence at work and in society in general, and in developing political strategies to combat the negative effects of managerialist ideology in those domains. The 'expansive' view presents managerialism as a sweeping hegemonic force that dominates society, whereas the 'focused' view argues for a much more limited scope of influence and focuses on a more empirical view of managerialism's effects. The purpose of this paper is to argue for the existence of these two points of view, to describe their differences, and also common ground between them that can constitute the basis for productive engagement between them that might lead to a critical perspective on managerialism that will help further CMS's emancipatory mission.

Managerialism is a term that frequently arises in both mainstream and critical accounts of work and employment (cf. Klikauer, 2013). In mainstream accounts, the term typically denotes the belief that the application of 'sound' management techniques should lead to beneficial outcomes for organizations (e.g., meeting strategic goals and objectives), and debates typically revolve around what a sound management technique is (e.g., the voluminous literature on leadership – cf. Bass & Bass, 2008). Managerialism in the mainstream sense also has an ideological dimension, as it encompasses the belief that managers have special administrative skills that non-managers (workers) do not have, making them qualified to monopolize decision making processes in organizations, a belief going all the way back to foundational works by Frederic Taylor and Elton Mayo. In mainstream circles, the moral appropriateness of managerial dominance is justified by their alleged ability to 'deliver the goods' in terms of efficiency and productivity, so research focuses on the refinement of managerial techniques in terms of those outcomes. Mainstream writers are by and large unified in this understanding of managerialism (cf. Orr & Orr, 2016; Enteman, 1993).

But, as a scholar who identifies with the CMS community, my interest in managerialism is two-fold. First, I am convinced that managerialism, as defined by all scholars, is a pervasive discourse that helps buttress management control of the workplace at the expense of rank-and-file employees. It is by no means necessarily the only such discourse, but it is an important one (Meyer, Buber, & Aghamanoukjan, 2013). Second, as a critical-scholar, my realm is primarily that of

academia. In my view, the concept of managerialism, is of both longstanding import within the CMS community (cf. Grey, 1996) but also one whose importance has risen in recent years, as evidenced by informal discussion at conferences, as well as more formally in the form of the publication of recent books (cf. Klikauer, 2013) and a steady stream of articles in critically-oriented journals.

This topicality of “managerialism” as a discourse in critical scholarships prompts my belief that the time is ripe to try and wrap our arms around that discourse and perhaps advance it, for both scholarly reasons of understanding and in terms of perhaps developing praxis with employees suffering under managerialism. That includes all of us. Academicians with tenured positions may have been protected from managerialist practices in the past, but as of this writing, scholars in the UK are on strike attempting to resist retirement scheme “reforms” that will slash pensions, a prototypical managerialist policy.

On this basis, this paper argues that in the critical domain, managerialism seems to have a diversity of meanings, some *expansive*, others more *focused*. For example, in the work of Klikauer (2013) and Parker (2002), managerialism is understood primarily in an expansive sense, as a belief system that has largely taken over western society and is making inroads in the few aspects of the socius it has yet to colonize. These writers largely share the mainstream ideological description of managerialism – it argues for privileges and power for a special interest (managers) as being of benefit to the general interest: If society allows managers to wield power and implement their techniques in work and governance organizations, we will all be better off. But unlike mainstream writers, these critically-oriented scholars are highly critical of this conclusion, arguing that it has led to the establishment of managerialism as a dominant, hegemonic discourse with negative outcomes for humanity. These writers believe that managerialism is responsible, or at least has played a significant contributory role, for many of the major negative political and economic events of recent years (e.g., the Great Recession of 2008+, the Eurozone crisis, the growing wealth gap between rich and poor in the West, and environmental degradation). It is thus an ideology to be combatted. Critical writers who have what I call an expansive orientation share an interest in explaining the alleged pervasiveness of managerialism, which they believe is something many are unaware of, and its wide-ranging negative effects, so as to build a case for opposing it.

But in the works of other critical writers such as Hassard and Rowlinson (2001) and Alvesson and Willmott (2002), managerialism has a more focused meaning. These writers do not regard managerialism as a discourse that dominates society, and they question the amount of power and autonomy that managers actually wield in organizations. To them, managerialism has a much more focused all-around impact. While writing from the perspective of different critical traditions (e.g., Rowlinson – Marxian; Alvesson and Willmott – postmodernist; Thompson – labour process), and agreeing with the “expansive” writers that managerialism does have negative effects, these writers regard it in focused and empirical terms, in the sense that they are skeptical of the view that managerial discourse in society or of the power of managers in work organizations is given or all-pervasive and is responsible for “all of the ills” that oppress people at work or other aspects of life, but rather is subject to limits or constraints by other forces, structures, or discourses, and it is the nature of those limits that is the object of investigation.

In this essay, I will call these the *expansive* and *focused* perspectives on managerialism. This distinction has not heretofore been recognized by the CMS community, but this paper argues that this distinction exists and has consequences for furthering a critical understanding of managerialism and for developing political responses. My purpose is to (a) justify the claim that these perspectives exist by document the differences between them, and (b) discuss commonalities among them and how productive engagement between them might have positive implications for furthering the study of managerialism within the CMS community. It is my contention that these differences are not merely trivial points-of-emphasis, but rather have broader implications for CMS’s goals of empowering workers. My contention is that one reason ‘mainstream’, pro-business perspectives on managerialism have been successful not only at work but in public policy is that conservative intellectuals essentially speak with ‘one voice’ about the nature and benefits of managerialism, whereas the varying perspectives that characterize CMS undermine our ability to combat them. My perspective is that CMS can be most effective in achieving practical benefits for employees if it can achieve at least a quasi-consensus on the nature of neo-liberal discourses, such as managerialism, that are damaging the dignity and economic prospects of rank-and-file employees. Doing so could allow CMS to speak with a “louder voice” in the public policy arena, much as climate scientists have been able to do, and thus have a better chance of effecting change. Of course, such consensus ought not to be declared by an enforcing authority, and must be subject to challenge and revision, but if arrived at honestly, can be of practical value.

A note about my perspective(s). When summarizing and synthesizing varying perspectives on an issue that inherently has political content, which I believe “managerialism” clearly does, one runs the danger of adopting a “God’s Eye View”

of the subject, which, among other things, misleadingly assumes one's own point of view on the subject is dispassionate and apolitical, and therefore more valid, 'objective', or 'rational' than the 'biased', partisan perspectives of the authors and works you are evaluating. It's therefore important to be as reflexive as possible, to oneself and one's 'audience'. In this case, I believe my point of view on the managerialism debate, and interest in moving it forward, is shaped by my intellectual heritage, which I might describe as "enlightened Marxism", that is, a Marxian point of view 'reformed' by an acknowledgment that while an analysis of class relations takes one a pretty good way in terms of understanding social and workplace dynamics, it doesn't provide a complete picture, and so an intersectional approach is crucial in terms of gaining greater insight. But to be clear, while I was one of the original signatories of Paul Adler's 1996 missive that helped found the CMS division within the USA Academy of Management, have served as an officer for AOM-CMS, have attended CMS conferences at both USA-AOM and CMS in Europe, and the now-defunct Sc'MOI conference, my connections to the more Marxian-oriented Labour Process Conference run longer and deeper.

My view of CMS's emancipatory tradition is that it (we/I) should be committed to empowering employees to achieve economic security and dignity in the face of hegemonic capitalism, with the longer-run goal of reforming or perhaps transforming the current economic system to one that is compatible with a comfortable and dignified standard of living for everyone, and one that is compatible with the sustainability of our natural world. Specifically, as it pertains to managerialism, I subscribe to Lynch's (2014) view that managerialism is "the organizational arm of neo-liberalism", that it is a set of managerial practices and ideologies designed to implement the neo-liberal aims described on page 5, and that CMS's emancipatory tradition is to combat the implementation of these essentially right-wing goals. In achieving this, the view of this white, male, hetero, class is "first among equals" among societal discourses, perhaps because I haven't been subject as much to the oppressions that arise from other dimensions of intersectionality. So please bear this in mind, as I will, as I work my way through this analysis.

Finally, my assessment of the existence of these two perspectives on managerialism was based on two approaches. First and foremost, it was an impression gained by my own informal understanding of the literature on managerialism as I have come to accumulate it over several years of study into it and other CMS concepts. Second, I conducted a general Google search to identify books and articles that referenced managerialism, as well as a search of specific journals that I regard as frequently publishing CMS-related articles, including *Tamara*, *Ephemeria*, *Organization*, *Human Relations; Work, Employment, and Society*, *Journal of Workplace Responsibilities and Rights*, *Management Learning; Gender, Work, and Organization*, and *Organization and Environment*. However, I did not conduct a systematic qualitative analysis of each article found, with coding for whether it was "E" (expansive) or "F" (focused) or possibly "O" (for other), followed by quantitative evaluation of whether enough articles fell in the E/F categories to justify my claim. My assessment was impressionistic – after conducting the search I felt that in a general sense the categorization was essentially justified – followed by a choice of examples to discuss in the paper that I regard as representative. I understand that interpretations can be contested (which would be the case even if I conducted the kind of systematic review described above) and that others who assess the same literature might draw different conclusions about the literature as a whole, or about my characterization of a given work. Perhaps this paper will spark that kind of discussion.

First, I build a case for alternative perspectives on managerialism. Next, I attempt to propose a basis for collaboration by highlighting common ground between them (while seeking to avoid the papering-over of important differences). Finally, I discuss action steps for the further study of managerialism from the point of view of furthering CMS's emancipatory mission.

Expansive approaches to Managerialism in CMS

One school of thought about the study of managerialism within CMS is what might be called the *expansive* approach. This approach tends to have the following characteristics: managerialism is regarded as a kind of world-view, a belief about how organizations and even society more broadly, should be governed, and one that has largely taken over western society and has become a, perhaps the, dominant global economic and political discourse. The research focus is on documenting this all-embracing nature of managerialism, which is assumed to not be self-evident -from this perspective one of the hallmarks of managerialism is that its influence is subtle and at least partially disguised, such that many do not recognize its pervasiveness and are hoodwinked into thinking managerial control of organizations is good, or at least necessary; and the broad-ranging negative consequences of managerialism (Noordegraaf & De Wit, 2012), such as its harmful impact on lower-level participants at work and on the natural environment (cf. Frankel, 2016). A major goal of the expansive approach is to persuade us that managerialism is wrong, in a moral sense. The audience for this work seems to be not only other

academicians, but the general public and policy makers, who are to be persuaded that managerialism is a pervasive, dominant discourse (cf. Alvesson & Willmott, 1996), and that it would be in society's interest to banish it. This perspective harkens back to classic Frankfurt-school "critical theory" approaches, in that it is an attempt to "open the eyes" of its audience to their domination by a hostile hegemonic ideology, in the belief that once this 'false-consciousness' is erased, people will be motivated to take the steps necessary to embark on a new course of social existence.

Typical of this perspective is the work of Parker (2002). In his book *Against Managerialism*, Parker discusses managerialism in expansive and ethical terms. Chief among his concerns is depicting managerialism as a dominant societal discourse, and one that is doing a lot more harm than good. Parker (2002) describes managerialism as a "global form of ideology" that is being "used to justify considerable cruelty and inequality" (back cover). More recently, Parker (2014) notes that "Within the so-called consensus of global capital where institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank thrive, the free-market is seen not just as a state of affairs to be achieved but, moreover, as something which will require ongoing management. This leads to the elevation of the figure of the manager as well as to the elevation of the ideology of managerialism. This in turn naturalizes astronomical levels of executive remuneration, on the one hand, and the various demands for political citizens to become better self-managers in response to the austerity drive's withdrawal of public services, on the other". Managerialism is thus viewed as having pervasive, socius-wide deleterious effects.

It is worth noting that Parker is not against "management" per se, as he acknowledges that in any kind of conceivable organizational configuration, it will be necessary for administrative duties to be carried out. His specific objection is against what he terms "market managerialism", which he describes as an ideological belief that "only markets run by professional managers can efficiently organize human action" (see Murphy, 2004: 122). Parker argues that this belief is the basis for how modern firms and societies are organized. This is problematic, because 'professional' managers are bearers of class relations: The modern professional manager has been trained in a kind of market fundamentalism, whereby the economic interests of the owner/capitalist class are taken as a given, and the interests of other stakeholders are regarded, at best, as opportunities to be leveraged for profit (as per "corporate social responsibility" initiatives that seek to build goodwill) or more typically, to be ignored as not promoting efficiency and productivity.

Parker argues that managerialism is a dominant discourse, one that is global in nature. It has succeeded in transcending cultural boundaries, as evidenced by its pervasiveness across countries. And, since managerialist organizations are often highly bureaucratic, there is an affinity with Weber's arguments about an "Iron Cage" of administrative hierarchy. But, whereas Weber's work emphasized the 'technical' nature of bureaucratic encroachment of social life, Parker makes the case that managerialism is immoral: The disempowerment of lower level organizational participants via the elimination of labor unions, rampant consumerism, and a culture of 'greed' is laid largely at the feet of managerialist ideology. Managerialism also labels any belief systems that seek to genuinely empower other (non-managerial) stakeholders as irrational, since only managers are technically qualified to make organizational decisions.

Who is to blame for managerialist hegemony? It's not just 'capitalists', per se. Parker looks in the mirror, arguing that business professors share the blame. Parker views the typical business school as a 'church' of managerialist ideology, such that students who major in business 'disciplines' do indeed have their minds disciplined in the tenets of managerialism. But it is not just 'mainstream', neo-liberal (i.e., the belief in laissez-fair capitalism to govern the economy, broadly characterized by fiscal austerity, anti-trade unionism, reduction of social safety nets, deregulation, and privatization of public institutions) professors who are responsible. Parker spends a considerable amount of time chastising CMS for its role in perpetuation of managerialist discourse, arguing that CMS is too inwardly-focused, too oriented towards trivial academic arguments and hence has little positive impact. He calls on CMS researchers to recall Marx's admonition that the point of critical scholarship shouldn't be merely to describe the world, but to change it and CMS research has precious little 'real world' impact. To an unacceptable extent, CMS scholars, secure in their comfortable university positions, are fiddling as the world 'burns'.

Similar arguments are made much more recently by Thomas Klikauer. Klikauer (2013) argues that managerialism has morphed over time from a set of management practices to an all-embracing societal discourse, stating that "In the orbit of managerialism, there is virtually no society left that remains unaffected by its authoritarian ideology" (Chapter 8). This happened because capitalism needed yet another "cloak" to conceal the profit motive, the basis of which is the exploitation of labor as characterized by Marx. Just as capitalism evolved from feudalism because at a certain political moment, the raw exploitation of feudalism became too much for people in general to bear (wage labor conceals exploitation by making it seem as if the worker is receiving a "full day's pay for a full day's work"), managerialism has evolved because capitalist exploitation in its raw, "satanic mill" form also became untenable. To Klikauer, the managerialist ideology, which he

describes as the “belief that the performance of any organization can be optimized by the application of managerial skills” (p. 5), is merely a cloak for the profit motive, because these managerial “skills” are not neutral in their design or application. Harkening back to Marcuse (1964), Klikauer argues that while in a truly ‘emancipated’ society, some administrative tools would be necessary to ‘make the trains run on time’; these would be very different from the “strategic management” and “human resource management” skills used by today’s managers, because these skills are designed to exploit the labor of non-supervisory personnel. Klikauer further argues that management buzzwords that indicate concern for something other than pure profit, such as ‘corporate social responsibility’ and the ‘triple bottom line’ are in reality window-dressing to cover up the raw exploitation of labor for the benefit of ‘hegemonic’ societal elite.

Like Parker (2002), Klikauer also argues that business schools are the incubators in which the soldiers of managerialism are created, including those of us who work under a CMS banner. Klikauer is even more scathing in his critique of CMS, calling the emergence of CMS an ‘adaptive mechanism’ by managerialism to siphon-off discontent among some professors. In effect, CMS is a kind of pressure-release valve in the academic domain. While Parker argues that CMS is effective at developing critiques of managerialism but often fails to deliver alternatives, Klikauer goes farther, arguing that CMS research is often disconnected from the ‘real world’ of employment relations under managerialism, describing it as an ‘intellectual sand-box’ in which critical scholars write papers for each other. CMS scholars fancy themselves as challenging managerialism, when in fact, CMS scholarship “... does not challenge the status quo, does not expose the ideology of management studies, and ... neither defies managerial capitalism nor deliver managerial alternatives” (p. 25). In essence, CMS is careerism on the part of those who practice it, as the only beneficiaries are those who manage to build comfortable positions for themselves as university professors by publishing CMS papers, even as managerialism reigns triumphant and creates a degraded living standard for non-elites around the world.

This theme of academic collusion with capitalism is also present in the work of Locke and Spender (2011) and Enteman (1993). These writers argue that managerialism has become the ‘dominant ideology’ of business school education, and from that base has evolved into the dominant societal ideology of our time as well. For example, Locke and Spender state “Today the people of the USA, indeed the world, live in difficult times, and to a significant extent American managerialism and US business schools have exacerbated these difficulties. Their ideas and actions shape the US and world economies and thus many lives” (p. x). Like Klikauer, Locke and Spender argue that managerialism is a cloak for profit motive, hiding this ‘need for greed’ behind ostensibly ‘neutral’ mathematical and statistical procedures of the kind utilized to optimize the value-added of global supply and value chains. Another point of convergence is that both Klikauer (2013) and Locke and Spender (2011) argue that managerialism is a failure even on its own, pro-capitalist terms. Both blame managerialist practices for events such as the global financial meltdown of 2008-2009, which cost economies trillions of dollars, and the looming threat of global environmental warming, which could wipe out the human species. Thus, managerialism has morphed from something originally created to serve the interests of special interests into a ‘true’ ideology, in the sense of being a discourse that is now beyond the control of its creators (cf. Deetz, 1992). It is not just ‘workers’ who are falsely conscious, managers and other economic elites are as well. The human race is heading for economic and environmental catastrophe and nobody seems capable of doing anything to stop it.

Granted, there are differences among the works of Parker, Klikauer, and Locke and Spender. Locke and Spender (2011) are much more sanguine about the power of critique, as offered by CMS scholars, to genuinely subvert managerialist ideology ‘from within’ and see the burgeoning field of CMS as a promising sign that managerialist discourse might be overthrown. Likewise, Locke and Spender are more optimistic about whether or not managerialism can be reformed from within or must be overthrown: They argue that managerialism used to have a more genuinely ‘human’ face, and harken back to the 1950s-1970s period of post-world-war II welfare state capitalism as a more enlightened time that we should seek to return to. In contrast, neither Klikauer nor Parker believe there was ever much redeeming about managerialism and call for its overthrow and replacement by radically different modes of organizing society. But, despite these differences, it seems fair to say that there are powerful common themes among these works – the emphasis on defining managerialism as a dominant social discourse, an ideology that has permeated the governance of firms and state institutions and the behavior of people in their ‘private’ capacities as consumers at least in part via the promulgation of managerialist doctrine in business schools, and the ascribing to it of a wide array of negative outcomes, largely responsible for the growth of wealth/income inequality across social classes, environmental degradation, and the declining influence of labor unions, collectively justify the expansive categorization.

Focused approaches to managerialism in CMS

In contrast to the expansive perspective on managerialism, another perspective focuses more on what might be called its focused empirical dimension, by which I mean the *degree* to which managerialism exists and what forms it takes under different institutional configurations. Whereas the expansive perspective characterizes managerialism as an all-embracing discourse, one whose tentacles permeate virtually all aspects of social life on a global scale, the focused tradition questions this assumption and its implications for achieving broad CMS goals such as worker ‘emancipation’ and environmental sustainability. While not denying the existence of managerialism as a social discourse/ideology, these writers question its hegemony and argue that other factors may mediate or influence its effects in organizations. Writers whose work is exemplary of this approach include Marxian scholars such as Hassard and Rowlinson (2001), postmodernist authors such as Alvesson and Willmott (2002) and labour process writers such as Thompson (2003/2013).

To Hassard and Rowlinson (2001; also see Hassard, Hogan, & Rowlinson, 2001), managerialism is the belief that the driving force of the behavior of organizations is the subjective beliefs and ideas of a firm’s managers. They trace managerialism back to the work of mainstream management writings such as those of Peter Drucker (1973), who argued that a revolution had occurred in the post-world war II business environment in which managers, not owners, became the dominant guiding force of a business’s behavior. Drucker’s arguments were developed and presented more formally in Chandler (1977), whose notion that firm behavior is now driven more by the “visible hand” of management rather than Adam Smith’s “invisible hand” of the market became the foundation of modern managerialist ideology. But, to Hassard and Rowlinson, these arguments vastly overstate the ability of firm management to substantively alter the nature of capitalist enterprises. Writing from a Marxian perspective, they critique not only ‘mainstream’ writers like those mentioned above but also the works of scholars writing from critical perspectives as significantly overstating the power and scope of managerialism.

For example, while lauding Braverman’s (1974) seminal work which revived critical interest in capitalist labour processes, which they regard as rightly structural-Marxist in its analysis, they critique the direction that “labour process theory” then took, arguing that in introducing concepts such as “frontiers of control” (Friedman, 1977) and the manufacture of “consent” on the part of workers (cf. Burawoy, 1979), labour process theorists became too enamored with the subjective motivations of managers (and workers) at the shop-floor or firm level, missing the bigger picture of how both are severely constrained by fundamental ‘laws’ of capitalist economies, such as the need to extract surplus-value from workers in order to earn profits and achieve capital accumulation. Similarly, Hassard, Hogan, and Rowlinson (2001) critique the notion that “... the constraint upon management in the labor process is the self-imposed requirement to preserve a role for itself—not the external constraint to extract a sufficient level of surplus value to satisfy the owners of capital. The subjective ideology of management becomes the dynamic of the capitalist labor process.” (p. 347). To Hassard and Rowlinson, managers are uninteresting as ‘personalities’ or as individual ‘subjectivities’, they are only interesting as bearers of class relations in a Marxian sense, and the reason for this is that managerial behavior is fundamentally determined by market imperatives. This theme is also evident in the work of Armstrong (2010), who neatly summarizes the Marxian view on managerialism by arguing that the range of behaviors that managers can exhibit is to be “either a bastard or a bloody bastard” (p. 56), meaning that all managers are essentially compelled to try and extract surplus from workers, and any apparent differences among them are trivial.

While Marxian writers argue that fundamental laws of capitalist production such as the profit motive sharply temper the impact of managerialist ideology on firm behavior, some postmodernists emphasize the mediating effects of subjective factors, factors that explain how managerialism is manifest at the workplace level and hence experienced by employees. For example, Alvesson and Willmott (2002) argue that managerial behavior is fundamentally driven not by structural imperatives of capitalism but by the inherent psychological need/desire to establish and maintain a positive and stable “sense of self”, or identity. Willmott does not argue that capitalism doesn’t have imperatives, or that a managerialist ideology isn’t a major societal discourse. But he does not regard it as hegemonic in the expansive sense either: “We reject any suggestion that management is omnipotent in its definition of employee identity. The organizational regulation of identity, we argue, is a precarious and often contested process involving active identity work, as is evident in efforts to introduce new discursive practices of ‘teamwork’, ‘partnership’, etc. Organizational members are not reducible to passive consumers of managerially designed and designated identities” (p.3). Rather, what is most characteristic of modern society is that we – managers, academicians, and workers alike – are caught in an existential dilemma of how to craft “selves” (in a Foucauldian sense) in a world in which discourses such as managerialism and market forces create psychological anxiety and instability, thus making it difficult to sustain a stable sense of self, meaning that people must expend a lot of psychic energy on the task.

To Alvesson and Willmott, therefore, the impact of managerialism on workplace behavior and in institutions more broadly is significantly filtered, mediated, by the coping mechanisms that individual managers and employees choose to craft their own sense-of-self. Thus, the goal of the critical researcher should be to document such mediation processes via case studies of particular workplaces, because rather than being ‘trivial’ (as per Hassard and Rowlinson) distinctions-without-differences in the face of hegemonic market forces, differences in managerial identity-maintenance strategies allow us to map the impact of discourses such as managerialism across the socius as they are actually experienced. This priority is reflected in recent work by Huang (2017), who studied the impact of managerialist ideology on teacher training in Macau. Huang conducted a Foucauldian analysis of subjectification, arguing that prevailing strands of managerialism are reflected in teacher training programs, which attempt to constitute teachers as “entrepreneurs”. This worked on some teachers, but more experienced teachers with a Confucian orientation were able to leverage that identity to resist being constituted as entrepreneurs and to channel managerialist trainings in more socially harmonious ways.

Finally, other writers who take a focused view of managerialism, including Thompson (2013), emphasize institutional mediators such as the role of the state, in influencing how managerialist discourse is manifested. Thompson’s perspective is developed as part of his “disconnected capitalism” thesis, which attempts to link traditional labour process theory to a broader political-economic picture. Like Hassard and Rowlinson, Thompson argues that while early labour process theory did have this ‘big picture’ focus (e.g., the work of Braverman), LPT has evolved/devolved in a direction which has made it myopically focused on capital-labor dynamics at the workplace level, leaving it without a theoretical account of how this activity is related to global discourses such as the financialization of the world economy, and ideologies such as managerialism.

Thompson’s view is that while managerialism is a global ideology, manifested in the neo-liberal policies of global financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, it is not all-embracing or all-powerful. Rather, its impact in different countries is markedly different, because state-governmental policies mediate those effects (thus creating multiple “capitalisms” around the world, rather than one monolithic experience). Government policies related to job training, safety net protections for the unemployed and retirees, minimum wage law, and trade policy, while influenced by managerialist ideology, still represent a powerful filter through which its impact on employees is experienced.

Note that there are different points of emphasis, and even conflict, among what I have labeled the focused point of view on managerialism. Marxian influenced writers such as Hassard/Rowlinson and Armstrong have little use for mediation approaches and focus on what they regard as fundamental laws of capitalism that sharply limit the discretion of managers to act as ‘free agents’ at work. In contrast, postmodernist writers such as Alvesson and Willmott argue that while managerialist ideology is at least somewhat powerful and pervasive, managerial subjectivity is of critical importance in filtering the impact of managerialism and other neo-liberal ideologies on lived experiences at work; while more institutionally-inclined thinkers tend to reject both the monolithic power of capitalist imperatives or identity-maintenance subjectivity in favor of a focus on the import of state policies in filtering managerialist prescriptions. Nevertheless, despite these important differences, all of these perspectives share a common theme: They question the omnipotence of managerialist discourse, arguing that it is at most one of several neo-liberal, pro-capitalist ideologies dominating western society, and its impact on the shape of employment relations and other aspects of the socius is tempered/filtered by other substantial institutions and discourses.

Implications of Expansive and Focused Conceptions of Managerialism for CMS

The preceding discussion was intended to highlight differences among the expansive and focused critical perspectives on managerialism in order to justify my claim that these two approaches to it do in fact exist in the CMS literature. To summarize, what I call the expansive perspective proposes that managerialism is a societally-pervasive ideology that largely dominates working life and many other aspects of political-economic existence, at least in western countries. It is the “ruling ideology of the age”. This perspective focuses its attention on explaining the rise of managerialism, how it became the dominant ideology, typically tracing its history back through Fordism to Taylorism, documenting its pervasiveness on a global level, how it maintains itself in the face of rival discourses (e.g., business school training – Thrupp & Willmott, 2003), and describing its wide-ranging negative consequences. To writers such as Klikauer, Parker, and Deetz, we are living in managerialist times, an era where managers run amok and where managerialism is devastating economies and the natural environment, and our goal as critical scholars should be to develop theories and practices that will lead to its overthrow.

In contrast, the focused perspective denies the all-embracing hegemony that the expansive perspective ascribes to managerialist discourse. To these writers, managerialist ideology has only a focused impact on ‘organizational behavior’,

because other factors either tie management's hands and do not allow for the free-reign of management agency or else have countervailing influences on that behavior. E.g., to Hassard and Rowlinson, there is a "principal-agent" problem, but it represents conflict between ruling elites, between the capitalists who own a firm and the managers hired to run it on a daily basis. But with regard to the deeper structural fissures of modern society, the cleavage between capitalists and workers, managers are fully aligned with the interests of owners. Managerialism is a super-structural factor that emanates from this basic economic conflict of class interests and contributes to justifying the elite position of owners; it does not drive that conflict of interests nor supersedes them. Similarly, writers such as Willmott and Thompson argue that managerialism's effects are significantly tempered by mediating factors such as anxiety-reduction concerns (Alvesson & Willmott) and state governance policies (Thompson, Hollman). These mediating factors not only influence how managerialism impacts workplace dynamics, but also the degree to which it does. Thus, the focused perspective argues that, far from being a 'total' ideology, managerialism is constrained by other societal discourses and institutional and psychological mediators. The goal of critical research should be to target these mediators so as to understand the precise, and focused, impact of managerialism on work outcomes as a means to mitigating the harmful effects of managerialist ideology.

But, it is important to recognize that these perspectives share some commonalities as well. First, both perspectives share the belief that managerialism is not merely a 'technical' term, it does not refer solely to the existence of management 'skills' such as planning, organizing, and supervising, rather it also has a normative component – it includes the belief that these skills are necessary to the 'efficient' functioning of modern organizations, which therefore helps justify the existence of hierarchical organizational structures in which those who possess these skills rightly control the activities of organizational members who lack them. Second, that managerialism has a practical existence, that it is not merely a theoretical concept, but rather it has adherents in managerial and scholarly ranks, such that managerialism is an ideology or discourse that has at least some degree of influence in the governance of organizations in particular and society more generally. Third, both perspectives agree that managerialism is an ideology that the institutions most CMS scholars work for – business schools – play a role in perpetuating, via business administration and management curriculums that extol the virtues and necessity of management hegemony in modern organizations. We help train the next generation of managers and managerialists, thus perpetuating the ideology's societal influence.

Finally, both of the critical perspectives on managerialism believe that this ideology is negative in its effects. Managerialism is regarded as serving the interests of society's ruling elites. It helps justify the control of large organizations by a managerial/bourgeois 'class', it helps justify their disproportionate command of organizational resources (e.g., the skyrocketing gap between top management pay and the pay of hourly workers) even in the face of economic disasters such as the global financial meltdown/recession of 2008-2009, and it has led to business practices that have harmed the natural environment, contributing to the global warming crisis. Managerialism is thus a 'right-wing' ideology and hence should be opposed by CMS scholars.

But, a curious aspect of the treatment of managerialism within CMS is the lack of engagement among the expansive and focused perspectives described herein. It's the reason I had to spend the preceding parts of this paper describing these different perspectives, to justify the claim that there are in fact competing perspectives on managerialism within CMS. One can scan the works that reflect the expansive perspective on managerialism without seeing a reference to works that reflect the focused perspective on managerialism, and vice-versa, and there is little to no active engagement between them (Hassard & Rowlinson being somewhat of an exception, but their critique is largely aimed at labour process theory generally, not its view of managerialism). This is surprising, because CMS is well-known for its internecine struggles (e.g., marxian vs postmodernist, qualitative vs quantitative research methods, etc.), to the point where we are arguably more combative about and critical of the works of other critical scholars than we are with the ideas of 'mainstream', pro-business organizational scholarship (Jaros, 2010). Additionally, there are 'strange bedfellows' within these perspectives. For example, on other topics, such as the nature of the labor process and critical methodology, writers like Hassard, Thompson and Alvesson/Willmott are often at loggerheads, yet all have a focused view on the nature of managerialism.

This lack of friction between ethical and empirical perspectives on managerialism might thus be regarded as welcome in an intellectual community often characterized by internecine struggles. But, I don't believe so; because the managerialism 'non-debate' has broader implications for CMS's mission, such that critical engagement is warranted. Thus, the differences and commonalities described above can potentially serve as a basis for a common understanding, and perhaps a productive engagement, between the focused and expansive perspectives; something I believe would be beneficial for advancing the CMS 'project' generally.

For example, CMS mission's has both theoretical and practical elements. An important theoretical goal is achieving understanding of organizational phenomena, to generate defensible truth-claims about organizational 'behavior', then to utilize this knowledge to achieve an emancipatory intent (cf. Cox, Letrent-Jones, Voronov, & Weir, 2009), because CMS has the broad goal of empowering people at work, of combatting the oppression and exploitation of capitalist employment relations. Even though much of CMS is critical of Marxian ideas, I think it is fair to describe it (us) as comporting with Marx's classic maxim that the point of inquiry should not be merely to understand the world, but also to change it.

Thus, in evaluating focused and expansive perspectives on managerialism, I argue that the expansive point of view has the better of it in terms of addressing the practical mission of CMS. Reading works like Parker (2002), Klikauer (2013), and Locke and Spender (2011), one is captivated by the passion with which these authors describe the all-pervasive, onerous and destructive aspects of managerialist ideology, of how it has captured hearts and minds, and is contributing to the growing gap between rich and poor and the decline of the middle class (in western societies), and its contributions to environmental catastrophe. Also, unlike in much CMS work, which as was stated is often characterized by in-fighting among critical scholars, the target of these 'ethical' works are the right-wing, neo-liberal ideas that currently dominate economic and political thought in the western world (cf. Nickson, 2014). These authors seem to "know who the enemy is" and have trained their guns accordingly. In contrast, this passion is lacking amongst those who adopt the focused perspective. Reading the works of Thompson (2013) and Alvesson and Willmott (2002), one derives some satisfaction for their appreciation of the complexity of how ideologies or discourses influence behavior, but there is little direct critique of neo-liberal ideology, while the work of Hassard and Rowlinson (2001) aims its critique at other critical schools of thought, such as labor process theory, not at neo-liberal ideas. The focused perspective strikes me as too apolitical, too esoteric in its concerns. It is more disconnected from CMS's emancipatory tradition.

However, a shortcoming of the expansive perspective is its heretofore lack of success: Despite their (in my view) convincing demolition of managerialism as an efficient and just governing ideology, these works have had limited impact outside of the academy. Critical scholars and perhaps even some administrators have become sensitized to the problem of managerialist ideology, but nevertheless, managerialist philosophy still holds considerable sway over practice in organizations. Even in the face of economic disasters such as the recent global recession, mortgage and financial meltdowns, and the ongoing currency and budget crises in the Eurozone, expansivists claim that organizations and societies continue to be run according to managerialist principles of laissez-fair, fiscal 'austerity', and the disempowerment of labor unions. There are many possible reasons for this, including the notion that "words alone do not matter", but, as the theme of this year's Academy of Management meetings acknowledges, words are also powerful, so as always we must be mindful of the need for our critical ideas to have practical impact.

One reason could lie in the nature of the expansive perspective itself, in that its all-embracing characterization of managerialism might make developing practical strategies difficult. To a large extent, the expansive view harkens back to older critical-intellectual traditions that also failed to make substantive impacts in the "real world". For example, in Klikauer (2013) there is a heavy dose of "false consciousness" doctrine that harkens back to 1950s Frankfurt School research: People accept or at least comply with managerialism because virtually all of us have been brainwashed to do so, and it is up to the enlightened critical scholar to pull the veil from people's eyes. This formulation has been critiqued extensively by both modernist and postmodernist research, and whatever the merits of those critiques, it is a model of engagement with the 'masses' that has not proved effective.

Similarly, the expansive approaches' view of managerialism as a monolithic, pervasive discourse may be problematic on more theoretical grounds as well. Reading works like Klikauer (2013), Locke and Spender (2011), and Parker (2002), it struck me that one could have substituted Ritzer's (1993) concept of "McDonaldization" or Weber's concept of the "iron cage" for the term "managerialism" and the arguments would have flowed about as easily and made the same sense. Just about everything (negatively) happening in society, from mortgage defaults to currency crisis to rising sea levels to AIDS levels in Africa is ascribed to the amorphous concept of managerialism. This begs the question of whether resistance to managerialism is even possible. Klikauer, for example, seems to argue that it might very well be irresistible to elimination by other human discourses and political movements, with the only realistic threat being a global warming catastrophe that ends managerialism by wiping out large swathes of human life itself. In contrast, a potential strength of the focused perspective is that it does not treat managerialism as "too big to fail" and thus possible to defeat: if we can tease out its effects in different domains, we can perhaps develop targeted strategies to counteract it in those domains. On the other hand, one can argue that the focused perspective is too enamored with the "trees", with what happens in particular workplaces,

and lacks the expansionist perspectives ability to see the “forest”, how these trees tie together to create a socius-wide tapestry of managerialist domination.

Thus, in my view, what CMS needs is an integrated view of managerialism, one that combines the political drive and passion of the expansive perspective with the nuanced empirical attention of the focused perspective. It is my contention that the expansive perspective has had focused practical impact because it assumes hegemony of managerialist discourse that unintentionally discourages the practical action it seeks to promote, while the focused perspective is itself focused because it assumes that managerialism lacks pervasive influence, and thus lacks commitment to applying the knowledge it generates via its mediation studies for emancipatory ends. The common-ground motivation to achieve this synthesis, or at least productive engagement, should be the shared belief that managerialism, to the extent it is dominant and is having an effect, almost always has a negative effect from the point of view of worker empowerment and emancipation. As some first steps towards achieving this, I propose the following initial action-steps:

(1) Collaborative engagement between focused and expansive researchers to clarify the extent of managerialism’s dominance in society. In order to combat managerialism the field needs a better, more empirically and also theoretically grounded, sense of the scope of the problem. Above, I discussed the possibility that the expansive perspective has too-monolithic, too-totalizing assumptions about the pervasiveness and power of managerialism, but that doesn’t mean it isn’t a very powerful discourse that has profound negative effects on the lives of ordinary people. Focused-perspective researchers may yet be underestimating the dimensions of the problem, and the work of expansive scholars could be informative on this point, something that hasn’t heretofore happened because the literatures have developed in parallel, without productive engagement.

Researchers who have expansive and focused views of managerialism could conduct collaborative research to address these differences and arrive at a common understanding. One advantage that mainstream views on managerialism have in the political domain is their unified stance on the efficacy of managerial control of organizations and neo-liberal prescriptions for the economy. As a fallback against criticism, they often invoke what Klikauer (2013) calls the TINA defense – “there is no alternative”. We need to develop alternatives, and to do that, we must be able to empirically document the scope of managerialism’s effects. Arguably, a step in this direction is Watts (2017), who discusses managerialism in USA/UK/Australian higher-education in an embracing, ‘expansive’ sense but whose qualitative research of the situation on the ground provides a more nuanced view of the limits of managerialism’s influence in today’s universities.

(2) Resolving some of these issues may involve addressing other contentious aspects of CMS research, such as the agency-structure dilemma (e.g., how much ‘agency’ do managers have to implement their ‘personal’ beliefs in the face of structural-capitalist ‘imperatives’) and the use of quantitative versus qualitative methods. For example, Rowlinson and Hassard’s perspective argues that structural dimensions of capitalism sharply constrain managerial agency at work. This should be treated as an empirical issue, but that means settling on appropriate methodological tools. CMS traditionally has favored case-study research over quantitative, survey-research methods associated with ‘mainstream’ management research, but it may be difficult to describe a full picture of a hypothesized global phenomenon like managerialism without methods that allow for the assessment of conditions in many organizations simultaneously on a broad scale.

(3) A commitment to applying these findings in the political realm, be it supporting laws that help workers organize and collectively bargain for greater wealth and power vis-à-vis management, or to working towards changes in business school curricula to emphasize the negative (as well as any positive) externalities of managerialist principles. Recent political-economic developments would seem to offer fertile ground for such proposals, as there is growing evidence even from ‘mainstream’ economists that managerialist prescriptions (such as ‘free trade’ and ‘austerity’ fiscal policies) are having a negative effect on economic growth in both the USA and Eurozone.

I offer these steps as perhaps constituting a way-forward to furthering our critical management studies understanding of managerialism so as to facilitate the development of practical policies to eliminate or ameliorate its deleterious effects on all non-elites in work organizations, in line with CMS’s mission to empower/emancipate lower-level participants in organizations, and reduce or eliminate the damaging effects of managerialism in society at large. As recent events, such as the ongoing UK pension strike, affirm, managerialist policies continue to have a negative effect on employees in many locations, even if, as ‘focused’ approaches tell us, these effects can sometimes be ameliorated or refracted via coping strategies. This paper is offered as one possible way for CMS to perhaps offer a more resonant and unified voice against managerialist policies, as well as clarify the nature of managerialism from a more purely academic posture.

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