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Management Ideas and the Social Construction of Organizations

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter examines cultural transformations that have contributed to the expansion of management ideas in number, domains, and across sectors. The discussion is organized around a conceptual model that depicts propositions arguing that cultural foundations underpin the expansion of management ideas and formal organization as core elements of contemporary society. These Page pageId="12"?>cultural foundations include scientization, individual rights and capacities, and ongoing individual education and professionalization. The processes identified are illustrated with examples of particular management ideas that have contributed to the standardization of organizations as a single, meta-form of social structure. The chapter ends by discussing research implications and future scholarly directions.

Keywords: organization, management, rationalization, institutional theory, organizational actorhood, scientization

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Introduction

THE study and practice of contemporary management is, first and foremost, about ideas. The recent expansion of management activity, and the burgeoning body of related research and teaching, is in large part driven by notions about what management can and should do. Although research on management ideas has become an important subject in its own right, the link between studies of management ideas and organization theory as a

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whole is rarely examined (Sturdy, 2004). Our aim in this chapter is to outline the role of management ideas in the broader cultural project of constructing proper organizations, and to provide a conceptual framework for situating specific management ideas (e.g. TQM, CSR, Balanced Scorecard) in a larger social context. We begin our analysis by delineating several major cultural transformations that influence the nature of contemporary management ideas, and then discuss how management ideas drive both the expansion of organizations and their social construction into responsible actors. Our analysis serves to underscore, in the end, that management ideas are central to the sociological study of organization and management.

A host of important studies examine how and why organizations adopt specific management ideas. Many of these studies investigate the relationship between idea adoption and organizational performance, often providing a critical analysis of the a-rational diffusion of fads and fashions (Abrahamson, 1991, 1996; Abrahamson and Fairchild, 1999; Carson et al., 2000; Czarniawska, 2005; Kieser, 1997). Notable studies have chronicled, for example, the diffusion of matrix management (Burns and Wholey, 1993), poison pills (p. 412) (Davis, 1991), knowledge management (Scarbrough and Swan, 2001), enterprise resource planning packages (Krumbholz and Maiden, 2001), organizational downsizing (Lee and Strang, 2006), telehomeworking (Peters and Heusinkveld, 2010), and process frameworks such as total quality management, six sigma, Lean manufacturing, and the ISO 9000 standards (David and Strang, 2006; Strang, 2003; Strang and Jung, 2005). A consistent finding has been that diffusion is most robust and lasting if a management idea is perceived to improve competitive standing or comes to be associated with market or category leaders (Strang et al., 2014; Strang and Macy, 2001).

In this diffusion literature, organization theory has been usefully deployed to understand the forces that lead management ideas to spread widely throughout organizational fields. Organization theory provides three main accounts of management idea diffusion. Rational/functional accounts focus on the linkages of management ideas to efficiency, effectiveness, and profitability, seeking to confirm a causal connection between the adoption of a management practice and organizational performance (Huselid, 1995; see also Staw and Epstein, 2000). Power/conflict accounts emphasize the interests of elites (or networks of elites) in the adoption and spread of management ideas, including those who run or own organizations (e.g. Davis, 1991; Davis and Greve, 1997). Institutional accounts, finally, provide social and cultural explanations for the flow of management ideas, pointing to shared definitions of rationality, widely accepted professional standards, patterns of relations among organizations, and mimicry in the face of uncertainty (e.g. DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Strang and Macy, 2001). Organizations in this latter account often decouple the adoption of management ideas, which have external sources, from their concrete application to internal organizational processes (Bromley and Powell, 2012; Meyer and Rowan, 1977).

In this chapter, we build upon these latter institutional accounts within organizational theory. We spell out arguments about how wider cultural foundations contribute to the broad scope of contemporary management ideas. Our cultural explication of the concept of ‘management idea’ seeks a deeper understanding of the proliferation of these ideas, and of the resulting organizational changes across sectors and domains. Our chapter proceeds by introducing our main conceptual schema, which depicts our four sets of hypotheses. We end by drawing implications from our arguments and suggesting future scholarly directions.

The Construction of an ‘Organizing Society’

That organizations in our contemporary culture are ‘social actors’ is an emerging proposition in organization theory (Bromley and Meyer, 2015; Brunsson and Sahlin-Andersson, 2000; King et al., 2010). The fundamental role of management ideas in this cultural shift is less studied. We present in this section a definition of what it means for (p. 413) an organization to be an actor and outline the cultural transformations that have contributed to an expansion of organizational actorhood. Figure 22.1 illustrates our core arguments, where bold arrows represent original theoretical contributions and light arrows extant argumentation.

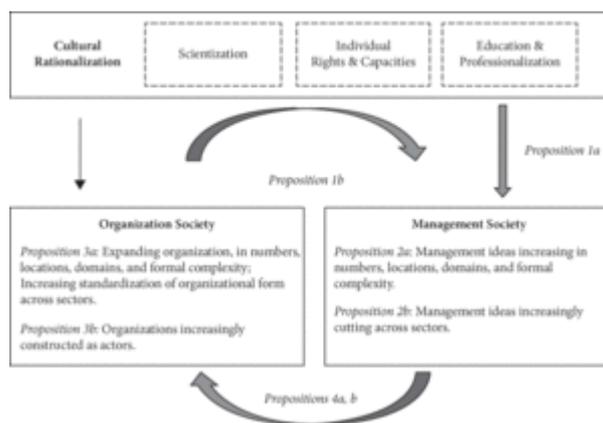


Figure 22.1 Management ideas and the construction of organizational actors

Existing institutional research (see the light arrow in the top left of Figure 22.1) has connected ‘cultural rationalization’ to our ‘organizing society’—a social milieu in which organizations have become ubiquitous, but also increasingly formalized and standardized in their structural makeup (Bromley and Meyer 2015; Bromley and Sharkey,

2017; Hwang and Colyvas, 2011). Greater understanding of the origins of our organizing society is important, as organizations are the meso-structures that oversee so many of our social purposes—from scientific advancement and democratic governance to the protection of human rights and the education of the masses. Weber (1922) identified rationalization as a process whereby means-end (rational) calculation, rather than tradition, values, or emotion, became increasingly accepted as an appropriate basis for human behaviour. More recently, Drori et al. (2006: 202) have drawn upon Weber to define cultural rationalization as ‘the explicit organization of clearly defined social

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entities and their roles, relationships, and activities around clear and general rules and toward clear and general purposes’.

Expanding especially since the Second World War, cultural rationalization has been an outgrowth of three sweeping social transformations (listed in the uppermost box of Figure 22.1). The first is the very high legitimation of scientific methods, which has fuelled our enthusiastic collective pursuit of objectified knowledge. *Scientization* describes this rampant process in which scientific knowledge is increasingly privileged over other forms of knowing and convincing, such as tradition and religion, emotion and personal experience (e.g. Drori et al., 2003). Scientization connotes a social project rather than a purely technical enterprise. It suggests a cultural movement that has extended beyond (p. 414) the hard sciences and technical domains to reach very far into our personal and social lives. An example concept capturing this forceful expansion of scientization is ‘medicalization’. This term describes the subjecting of ever more facets of human experience (e.g. sleep, personality, mood, loneliness, obesity) to categorization, diagnosis, and management by medical professionals (Conrad, 1992). Medicalization is evident, for instance, in the evolution of our understanding of prostitution—no longer perceived as a moral choice or simply a legal matter, but also as a potential medical and psychological concern whose deep socio-economic origins need to be holistically understood and remediated.

The second transformation is the increasing construction of human beings as vested with a wide range of *rights and capacities*. Brought about by recent civil and human rights movements in the West and increasingly worldwide, this transformation has rendered individuals as fundamental social units whose status is sacred and inviolable (see Durkheim’s ‘cult of the individual’; Elliot, 2007; Jepperson, 1991). Marking this transformation has been an expansion in the ranks of individuals. Previously excluded groups—blacks, gays, women, children—have gained status in the past century. The rights of these new individuals have meanwhile proliferated (Elliott, 2007). No longer limited to education, voting, due process, and safe working environments, these rights are now verging upon clean air, universal healthcare, basic income, the Internet, and many other topical concerns. Individuals, finally, have become more empowered in recent decades. They have been vested with capacities to make myriad important decisions—about healthcare, schooling, jobs, friendships, neighbourhood, identity, and so forth. The effect of these changes is an overall increase in individual actors and actorhood (Meyer and Jepperson, 2000). Meyer (2010: 3) gives a helpful definition: ‘An actor, compared with a mundane person or group is understood to have clearer boundaries, more articulated purposes, a more elaborate and rationalized technology. An actor is thus much more agentic—more bounded, autonomous, coherent, purposive and hard-wired—than a person.’ Actors are the entities in our society with legitimated rights, capacities, and responsibilities, the entities empowered to pursue interests and effect social change.

The third transformation is the massive societal expansion of *education* (Benavot et al., 1991; Meyer et al., 1992). Education has expanded in available subjects, duration, and intensiveness. Not only primary, but also secondary, post-secondary, and *lifelong*

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education are increasingly expected of individuals (Jakobi, 2009). The highest levels of our education system mould individuals into professionals—accredited and credentialed users of scientized knowledge in real-world settings (Schofer and Meyer, 2005; Suárez and Bromley, 2012). This third transformation is, of course, intertwined with the previous two: an expanded education system disciplines the amplified actorhood of empowered individuals. It inculcates into these individuals legitimated courses of action, which are oriented around rationalized, scientized knowledge while conforming to progressive, humanistic values. Due to these cultural transformations, it is now possible to imagine a ‘world society’ built on similar bedrock—empowered, educated individuals pursuing rationalized, socially sanctioned ends and increasingly drawing upon the authority of scientific knowledge to persuade and influence (Meyer et al., 1997).

(p. 415) As noted in prior research (see the light arrow of Figure 22.1), these broad cultural transformations have impacted not only individuals but also the collective structures of contemporary society—namely, organizations. Organizations are now cast by these cultural transformations into the same mould of their individual members. Organizations, too, are now routinely treated as though they are autonomous, bounded social actors. Not simply an aggregation of their members’ activities, and not reducible to a nexus of economic contracts, organizations are now imbued legally and in the cultural imagination with anthropomorphic qualities. There are numerous trappings of this cultural shift towards singularized and individualistic organizational identity. Organizations now brand themselves as having essentialist, highly moralistic traits (e.g. Google’s famous slogan ‘Don’t be Evil’). They pen mission statements that feature humanistic objectives in addition to ones that are merely technical (e.g. Wal-Mart’s motto to ‘Save Money; Live Better’). They construct personas characterized by explicitly enumerated ‘core values’ (e.g. Coca-Cola’s ‘Integrity and Passion’ are human-like values listed alongside the business-like ones of ‘Collaboration and Quality’). Finally, organizations articulate and display their responsibility to broad classes of social constituents, for example through sustainability reports and through participation in multi-stakeholder venues such as the World Economic Forum (Pope and Lim, 2016). Oftentimes organizations enact their social responsibilities with great creativity and discretion, as when the fashion brand Kenneth Cole created the highly distinctive ‘Aweerness’ movement to support military veterans. The organization, this is to say, now has an enlarged purpose (‘Mission’) and a greater sweep of actorhood (‘Vision’), but also a more integrated personality (‘Values’).

How these three cultural transformations have shaped management ideas is less studied (see the bold arrow in the top right of Figure 22.1). In taking up this subject, we discuss first the impact of scientization on management ideas. Scientization, connoting the cultural authority of presumably generalizable knowledge, is now the dominant mode of thinking about organizations. The management discipline, indeed, was founded on scientization. The publication of Frederick Taylor’s ‘principles of *scientific* management’ (emphasis ours) is considered by many historians as the dawning of modern management. Taylor’s principles explicitly cautioned against unscientific methods, such as ‘rules of thumb’ and tradition, and instead advocated for theoretically oriented and

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empirically valid approaches to recruit workers, execute organizational tasks, and assess performance (see Shenhav, 1995, for a more detailed history). Henri Fayol (1916), for similar reasons, is considered a foundational figure for the management discipline, also due in large part to the highly scientized nature of his influential analytic framework. This framework laid out a set of fourteen management principles, enumerated and organized under such high generalities as the 'division of work' and 'authority and responsibility'. The turn to scientized knowledge that marked the founding of management as a discipline continues to the current day (e.g. Hambrick, 2007).

Scientization increases the basis for new management ideas by framing organizational problems as having general and abstract solutions that are transportable across local and particular settings. Inevitably, as the resulting scientized knowledge is shown in some (p. 416) instances to be false or comes to interact with intractable situated problems, an opening is provided for waves of competing and compensatory management ideas about what actually works. As such, while we have witnessed numerous revolutions in the various theoretical paradigms of organization theory, the scientific epistemology that underlies it all has been highly resilient, remaining largely unshaken in the past hundred years.

The second cultural transformation, the empowerment of individuals and their vesting with expanding rights and capacities, also provides a basis for the proliferation of management ideas. Most directly, organizations now seek to incorporate the latest thinking on how to respect and motivate their employees. Human relations, as with scientization, was an early emphasis in the management discipline. The embrace of scientization that marked the founding of the management discipline was quickly met by calls from organizational psychologists for a more holistic management of the 'human side of the enterprise' (McGregor, 1957). The famous Hawthorne Studies (Mayo, 1949), for example, suggested that the depiction of workers-as-machines (as in Taylor's time-motion studies) needed to be amended with attention to worker social and emotional well-being. The vesting of humans with rights and capacities that continued throughout the last century led to a profusion of legislation that directly impacted organizations. Laws have been created in domains as disparate as minimum wage, occupational health and safety, overtime, whistleblowing, unions, child labour, forced labour, sexual harassment, and age, gender, and sexual orientation discrimination. Human relations, even today, continues to drive new frontiers in management ideas. Myriad popular magazines now rank companies on progressive personnel practices such as maternity leave and telecommuting. Consistently ranking as the best place to work in America, Google Inc. for example is somewhat famous for its free meals, free gym memberships, free nap pods, and free massages. These practices, it should be noted, are held out by Google as one of its competitive advantages.

The cultural emphasis on rights and capacities extends beyond individuals to social aggregations. The rise in management ideas for respecting individuals has coincided with the advent of ideas for respecting classes of stakeholders more broadly (Freeman, 1984). Not only primary stakeholders (managers, investors, employees) but also secondary

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(communities, regulators), tertiary (media, academia), and notional stakeholders (the environment, unborn children) are now thought to have standing before organizations. As a result of this stakeholder empowerment, organizations now engage in relationship management of all sorts, much of it formalized into standing organizational departments. Commonly there are departments for human relations, but also for shareholder relations, public relations, and government relations. There are also new venues for multi-stakeholder interaction, including trade associations and chambers of commerce, but also sustainability coalitions and private–public partnerships such as the United Nations Global Compact (Meyer et al., 2015). The more general point is that the discourse of rights and obligations has moved the purview of management ideas from industrial concerns to the broader realm of human and stakeholder management.

(p. 417) It should be underscored that the effect of individual rights and capacities on management ideas is dynamic. Rather than simple diffusion, human rights discourses create a movement towards newer ideas. For example, Edelman et al. (1999) show how an emergent cultural discourse on human rights provided the opening for an entirely new arena of management ideas. Their historical account focuses on the new kinds of anti-discrimination employment laws that were spurred by the civil and women’s rights movements. They note that organizations were unsure of how to achieve legal compliance, and so relied on professionals to create solutions, resulting in the proliferation of grievance procedures overseen by compliance offices. These management ideas diffused quickly across organizations as they became accepted by the courts, thereby triggering further expansion of the roles of human relations departments and internal counsels.

Lastly is the cultural foundation of education, particularly the expansion of professionalization through higher education. This cultural shift, too, has directly impacted management ideas. Indeed, a large proportion of the expansion of higher education is specifically in the realm of business administration. Of all US undergraduate degrees, for example, business degrees are the most conferred by a large margin—about 21 per cent of undergraduate degrees and 25 per cent of masters programmes. Business schools are the entities that have been the most central in legitimating management ideas as valid and in certifying individuals as competent to deploy this knowledge. Illustrating the point, scholars such as Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall (2002) have outlined how business schools (as the producers of management knowledge) and consultants and other business professionals have expanded in scope and scale, and with them the number and variety of management ideas (see also Engwall et al., 2016). By populating the business field with consultants and other professionals who are linked up to the deepening and dynamic stock of business knowledge through lifelong training and memberships in practitioner associations, the educational system has prepared the management field with numerous receptor sites for the rapid and extensive diffusion of management ideas.

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Overall, these trends generate new management ideas and solidify the category of 'organizational actor' as a standard form. The presence of more formal organizations in more domains gives rise to additional new management ideas. More formally, the arguments above lead to the following propositions about when and where to expect an expansion in the stock of management ideas.

Proposition 1a: Increased cultural rationalization generates an expansion of management ideas.

Proposition 1b: Increased cultural rationalization creates an organizational society, which further generates an expansion of management ideas.

Management ideas, as suggested above, have increased in number, but they have also spread to new organizational domains. There are increasing ideas, not only about how to improve quality or efficiency, but also how to manage workers, the environment, (p. 418) and stakeholders more generally. Maternity leave, ergonomic desks, sustainability reporting, and fair trade sourcing are examples of new organizational domains that have been heavily theorized in recent years. The potential for management ideas to annex and colonize new organizational areas, as discussed above, stems from the nature of scientization, which employs abstraction to commensurate disparate domains. It also stems from the rise of modern individuals educated in 'scientized' discourses and empowered to deploy it through courses of professionalization.

Proposition 2a: Management ideas are expanding to new domains.

Management ideas are also increasingly applicable to a broadened range of organizational forms. Organizational form, as a term, suggests distinctions by organizational sector (private, public, and voluntary), type (university, charity, foundation, or firm), and legal structure (for-profit, non-profit, trust). The boundaries of organizational forms, in practice, are increasingly blurred. Management ideas increasingly cut across previously disparate organizational populations. For example, organizational branding, a recently popular management idea, can be applied not only to firms, but also to departments, divisions, non-profits, or even to entire countries. Sustainability certificates can be awarded to products or services, but also to facilities or parent companies. Charities, hospitals, and schools now have codes of conduct, codes of ethics, or whistleblower policies the way many businesses do. Sensitivity training, to take another management fashion of recent decades, could as easily be required of charity workers as the employees of a Fortune 500 firm. Or a hospital could implement a focus on corporate culture, strategic vision, or core competencies, much like a city council, university, or restaurant chain. Churches can and do hire consultants to develop rational strategies for how to expand their congregations and increase member satisfaction (Putnam et al., 2012). The hypothesis below emerges from these and earlier arguments.

Proposition 2b: Management ideas increasingly spread across organizational forms.

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As management ideas arise in new domains and spread across forms, they provide a new basis for delineating the proper boundaries of organizations. The case of corporate social responsibility (CSR) illustrates this well. CSR has become extremely widespread, despite its unclear linkages to profitability for most organizations (Margolis and Walsh, 2003). The vast majority of the world's largest corporations now publish annual sustainability reports and have extensive website sections dedicated to communicating CSR programmes, policies, and initiatives (Tsutsui and Lim, 2015). CSR is a construct that fundamentally rethinks the scope of organizational duty, 'embodying new assumptions ... that both reinforce and challenge the institutional model' (Windell, 2006: 1). CSR challenges the institutionalized model by expanding an organization's duty to include environmental, community, and social concerns that are tangential to core operations. At the same time, CSR reinforces the institutionalized (p. 419) model, based on neo-liberal economic principles, by vesting organizations (rather than governments or regulators or third-party welfare groups) with the responsibility for effecting important social changes.

CSR discourse, it is important to note, has spread across organizational forms, contributing to a more standardized blueprint for proper organizing regardless of sector (Pope and Meyer, 2015). Originally targeted to businesses, CSR discourse increasingly implicates, for example, non-profits. Many non-profits now participate in the CSR movement in equal standing with corporations. Many now have codes of conduct and are rated according to their transparency and accountability (Bromley and Orchard, 2016). Non-profits now publish responsibility reports through the Global Reporting Initiative, certify the sustainability of their facilities through the LEED programme, or participate in global CSR associations such as the World Economic Forum. Of course, CSR is not the only management idea that non-profits have borrowed from businesses, in the process contributing to increased isomorphism across organizational forms. Non-profits have also adopted a business-like emphasis on metrics, expressed in new courses of strategic planning (Bromley et al., 2012) and formal programme benchmarking and evaluation (Hwang and Powell, 2009). Non-profits, lastly, have become more like businesses through the adoption of softer marketing skills related to logos and branding campaigns (Delmestri et al., 2015; Drori et al., 2013).

Proposition 3a: Management ideas provide new content that redefines the boundaries of proper organization.

By selecting from the enlarged stock of management ideas available in the discursive environment, management engages in moments of decision-making that enables organizations to enact their status as actors. Actorhood is not routinized, but discretionary. Bureaucratic administration suggests activity, not actorhood. Rational calculation and decision involves integrating and balancing a set of considerations that are difficult, if not impossible, to accurately weigh, and thus requires actors for legitimation and accountability (Brunsson, 1982, 1990, 2007). Organizations as actors must seek out new ideas of how to do things better, scan the environment for threats, and aim to continually innovate and improve. Organizations generally choose from the stock of legitimated management ideas because, as discussed above, they are beholden to a

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larger and larger set of empowered stakeholders, who will heavily punish failures not premised on norms of good practice. Management acts out its actorhood by searching for and adopting or rejecting management ideas. The associated processes of evaluating and deciding to keep or drop management ideas is premised on the stock of management ideas itself, which sets the boundaries of legitimate organizational actors in an environment of multilateral accountability and extensive professionalization. This leads to the following proposition:

Proposition 3b: Management ideas provide occasions for an organization to enact its status as an actor.

(p. 420) Our final argument is that the relationship between organizational actors and management ideas is bi-directional. While management ideas constitute organizations as actors, as organizations become standardized as actors, management ideas spread more easily. For point-to-point diffusion to occur smoothly, as observed by Strang and Meyer (1993), receptor sites have to be socially constructed as essentially similar. In the present case, organizations are constructed as rather standardized social actors—actively scanning their environment for sources of improvement and insight into proper activity. A good organizational actor, thus, will take up a new management idea more easily than an organization that is less of an actor. As professionalized and empowered managers scan their environments for good and justifiable ideas, as management ideas become more abstract and more portable across sectors, such that new recommendations can be imagined to apply to any organization, management idea diffusion increases in reach and intensity.

These arguments help to explain a key finding of a historical analysis of the sixteen major management fads since the 1950s (Carson et al., 2000). Recent decades saw a larger number of highly popular management ideas, which tended to diffuse more broadly. Whereas the 1960s saw only one major management fashion (sensitivity training), the 1970s saw two (quality of life programmes and quality circles), the 1980s saw four (corporate culture, total quality management, ISO 9000 standards, and benchmarking), and the 1990s saw six (employee empowerment, horizontal corporations, vision, re-engineering, agile strategies, and core competencies). This study, this is to say, seems to demonstrate that the organizational system itself has become more amenable to management idea diffusion. In sum, we argue:

Proposition 4a: Management ideas will diffuse more rapidly as organizations become actors.

Proposition 4b: The diffusion of management ideas will extend across organizational forms (e.g. firms, non-profits, government agencies) as organizations become actors.

The influences that generate the spread of management ideas across organizational forms likely come in two directions. First, organizations that are actors are more likely to adopt any given idea, even ideas that are not intended for their form, because organizations see themselves as an abstract unit. Second, because management ideas are

becoming more abstract, the ideas themselves are more likely to apply to an array of organizational forms.

Limitations and Future Research

We have sketched our arguments in broad strokes. We do not, for example, consider the expansion of *which* arena of scientization (e.g. an academic field, the consulting industry, the business press, etc.) is more strongly associated with management idea (p. 421) expansion. Our arguments are also not based on an original dataset. Future empirical study could usefully collect and classify a longitudinal sample of management ideas to refine our general arguments and tease out the mechanisms involved.

Importantly, our arguments do not suggest an inevitable trajectory of management idea expansion, nor do they imply organizational homogeneity. Our causal story is rooted in specific cultural transformations that vary across time and contexts. It is quite plausible, for example, that the trends we identify are stronger in contexts where centralized and/or traditional forms of authority are weaker. It may be the case, further, that we will see a return to older organizational forms with the recent resurgence of nationalism and populism in some quarters of the globe. Existing studies indicate the possibilities of further research in this direction. For example, CSR-related management ideas appear to have diffused much earlier throughout Western societies where there is a greater emphasis on individualism and discretionary virtue (Matten and Moon, 2008; also see Guillén, 1994). Likewise, management ideas related to quality circles have emerged and diffused more readily in Eastern cultures where there is a greater emphasis on collectivism and social cohesion (Dahlgard et al., 1998).

Empirical study of the domains that most attract management ideas would also be useful. Adopting a management idea is perhaps particularly attractive when there is no obvious functional solution; professional managers take on the role of creating rules and making sense in domains where the problems are not merely technical. Sometimes responses are defined by law or accounting rules, but sometimes a quasi-professional (e.g. chief trust officer, chief sustainability officer) legitimates the organization's approach by drawing on dominant ideas in the wider field. Our main contention is that adopting ideas is not just about diffusion. As professionals, managers and consultants bring in ideas, they reshape the boundary of the organization, defining what it can and should do. Ideas are central in determining where organizational boundaries will exist, as these boundaries are constructed rather than natural demarcations. Suddaby and Viale (2011), for example, outline in detail how professionals are a source of institutional change—in the process (perhaps unintentionally) defining and constructing organizational actors.

Conclusion and Implications

As the study of management ideas has grown, scholars have increasingly noted the importance of linking this research to broader organization theory. Responding to these calls for cross-fertilization, we have formed initial arguments that suggest that the study of management ideas is, or should be, central to understanding organizations as social constructions. We have drawn on institutional theories to observe that management ideas play a central role in setting the boundaries and roles of organizations. We have pointed to cultural transformations related to individualism, scientization, and mass education that have driven the expansion of management ideas (in numbers and (p. 422) domains), shape their nature (abstract), and influence their subsequent diffusion (increasingly rapid and indiscriminate across organizational forms). This recognition of the role of management ideas in constructing organizations in general (not just in solving technical problems of specific types of firms or non-profits) helps to explain why management ideas are now spreading so readily across different sectors and domains (for-profit, non-profit, government agencies).

In addition, we have focused on the centrality of management ideas in the construction and enactment of organizational actorhood. Management ideas do not just flow from and into fixed organizational entities; as ideas emerge and diffuse, they reshape our understanding of what an organization can and should do. Specific ideas are often ephemeral, but as a whole their expansion is linked to durable, deeper notions of actorhood that are increasingly based on the notion that organizational actors should be socially responsible. Moreover, linking management ideas to organizational actorhood provides purchase on understanding waves of reform as endemic to the system (beyond the particularities of why any single idea comes and goes; see Power, 1997, for similar arguments about auditing). Organizational actors should be actively scanning the environment for strategies and practices to adopt and evaluating and monitoring their current practices. This expectation of actorhood provides an overall explanation for why we see a general proliferation of managerial ideas along with rapid waves of diffusion and deinstitutionalization.

The chapter in this volume by Martin Parker details an additional implication of our analysis. His chapter, likewise, observes the hegemony that management ideas have gained in organizational discourse, the prevailing perception that management ideas offer 'the best way to organize'. Parker contrasts management ideas, singular and prescriptive in their pursuit of greater organizational control and performance, with the dizzying variety of organizational structures that humans have devised. Communes, sects, charities, associations, matriarchies, and dozens of other examples are rooted in 'other places, other times, other politics' and associated with a very wide range of organizational processes and desired outcomes. Parker suggests that this rich organizational history and the many insights that can be gleaned from it have been lost by our ontological commitment to the elitist notion of 'management'. Our chapter, in short, could be read as a backstory to Parker's: management ideas have become so ascendant and so unshakeable because they have been ushered in by tectonic shifts to

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our cultural bedrock. Parker's chapter puts forward a worrisome implication of this expansion: since management ideas presuppose managers and hierarchy, their expansion may create and reinforce occupational inequality.

A final implication that emerges from our analysis is that the elaboration of management ideas contributes to organizational expansion. Abstract management ideas allow for the creation of standardized practices across organizations and throughout organizational fields (see also Rasche and Seidl, in this volume). Myriad widely known institutions, practices, and ideas can be imported rather quickly and easily to constitute local settings. Management ideas connect organizations to the wider world, embedding them in a discursive time and place. An odd consequence is that a tension emerges whereby an organization that adopts more outside ideas is more of an actor, but one that (p. 423) is constructed by, and dependent on, external cultural resources. Management ideas not only emerge from cultural and societal transformations, they also contribute to them by providing the conceptual foundations of a global organizational society. The implications of management ideas extend, in short, far beyond management.

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