



Hyper-Management: Neoliberal Expansions of Purpose and Leadership

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Patricia Bromley
and John W. Meyer 

Abstract

Recent decades have witnessed a discursive expansion of calls for abstract and charismatic management beyond the systematic administration of concrete settings—hyper-management. A first dimension of hyper-management is the lionization of individuals and organizations as empowered purposive actors, embodied in celebrations of vision, innovation, and entrepreneurship. A second dimension is the intended unification of empowered internal and external actors and their diverse purposes, manifest in calls for leadership qualities beyond formal authority such as communication, collaboration, and inspiration. The changes are broad and cultural, cutting across countries and social sectors, and are often decoupled from realistic practice. Thus they are better accounted for by a neo-institutional perspective than by theories emphasizing particular functions and interests. Hyper-management is generated by a culture of global neoliberalism and the ideologies of empowered individual and organizational actorhood that flow from it. During the global hegemony of neoliberal culture, hyper-management has become institutionalized in contemporary education programs, consulting arrangements, and exaggerated managerial status and income. But, given its cultural bases, current and future resistance to neoliberal globalization may undercut it.

Keywords

actorhood, globalization, institutional theory, management expansion, neoliberalism, organizational expansion, world society

Stanford University, USA

Corresponding author:

Patricia Bromley, Stanford University, 485 Lasuen Mall, Stanford, 94305-6104, USA.
Email: pbromley@stanford.edu



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Liberal and especially neoliberal globalization have generated an expansion in the imagined capabilities of individuals and organizations to pursue purposive action (Djelic & Sahlin-Andersson 2006; Drori, Meyer, & Hwang, 2006). As neoliberalism emerged as a hegemonic cultural force, the dominant discourse in organization and management theory shifted in turn; theories and models touted by gurus and in training programs, popular accounts, and (to a degree) actual organizational processes and strategies, came to reflect a vision of organizations as empowered and responsible “social actors,” beyond their narrow aims (King, Felin, & Whetten, 2010).¹ One result has been the transformation of older, distinct entities—firms, charities, hospitals, universities, and the like—into more similar “hyper-organizations” that incorporate multiple purposes and rationalized processes, and proliferate across sectoral and national boundaries (Bromley & Meyer, 2015). A second, reciprocally related result is the rise of a new management discourse which we call hyper-management. Hyper-management lionizes individual and organizational stakeholders as empowered purposive actors, while simultaneously seeking to unite these diverse and empowered internal and external actors around collective goals and social progress.

In this paper, we analyze the current wave of hyper-management discourse that emphasizes diffuse individual and organizational charisma and empowerment, in contrast to centralized bureaucratic authority or narrow technical rationality. We see two main dimensions: expanded purposes and expanded leadership. Legitimated expanded purposes of empowered individuals and organizations are embodied in the contemporary valorization of vision, innovation, and entrepreneurship. Expanded leadership of these empowered actors is manifest in calls for communication, collaboration, and inspiration. Both dimensions arise in a historical and cultural context of global neoliberalism and the ideologies of empowered individual and organizational actorhood that flow from it. Under

neoliberal cultural conditions, we observe the institutionalization of hyper-management in arrangements of pay, status, education, and consulting. Looking ahead, we consider the implications for hyper-management of a recent weakening of neoliberal culture. Innovation, entrepreneurship, and charismatic leadership have been seen with suspicion in the past, and may be again in the future (see for example Godin, 2015, for a history of the largely pejorative meanings of “innovation” and related terms prior to the twentieth century).

The rise of hyper-management cuts across countries and social sectors, and is often strikingly decoupled from realistic practices. Change is thus better accounted for by a neo-institutional perspective focusing on the rationalized cultural environment than by theories emphasizing particular functions and interests. A neo-institutional perspective is especially useful in considering the organizational consequences of large-scale cultural changes (Thomas, Meyer, Ramirez, & Boli, 1987). In particular, foundational cultural and ideological shifts generate changes in management discourse, but the discursive shift is only loosely coupled to organizational activities; practices change to a degree, but a great deal of decoupling from dominant discourse results (Bromley & Powell, 2012; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). In applying this line of thought, we follow Tocqueville (1836[1969]), Mead (1964), and many other analysts in arguing that the weak-state liberal society—now globalized in a world lacking anything like a central state—generates expanded cultural accounts of the individual as the central actor in society, and of the resultant organization as an autonomous social actor (Meyer, 2010). Discussions of social control and order in American society have long focused on individuals, and the organizations they create, as central actors. In positive assessments, running from Tocqueville to Putnam (2000), American society empowers the individual. In negative ones, American society encourages strong conformism and social control (classically Lewis, 1922; Mencken, 1936; Riesman, Nathan, & Reuel, 1950; Whyte, 1956).

Background: Managerial and Organizational Expansion

Early in the history of the corporation, “titans of industry” (alternatively, “robber barons”) exercised authoritative control over their empires (Mizruchi & Marshall, 2016). To the extent ideas of management existed, they envisioned “great men” or sovereigns sitting at the top of bureaucracies, holding a great deal of power (Borgatta, Bales, & Couch, 1954; Wart, 2003). Subsequent theories of management tamed and routinized this imperative authority (Shenhav, 2002). Managers were attributed with expertise in making firms run efficiently (Chandler, 1993; Taylor, 2004), embodied in trends such as transactional leadership (e.g., Bass, 1990; Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987), managerial leadership, or scientific management. Institutionalized with the rise of business schools, managers gained some of the standing associated with the traditional professions (Khurana, 2010; Sahlin-Andersson & Engwall, 2002), and some independence from owners (Berle & Means, 1991).²

Overall, autonomous “organizations” began to replace sovereign-serving bureaucracy, and the theory and practice of the modern “society of organizations” developed (Coleman, 1982; Hwang & Colyvas, 2011; King et al., 2010). Organizations were seen as complex technical systems held together by professional and narrowly rational management. Unlike bureaucracies or associations, modern organizations and reciprocally related organization theory are directly built on notions of actorhood and decision-making (Bromley & Meyer, 2015; Brunsson, 2007; March, 1994; Scott, 2014). Many canonical accounts capture the historical expansion of organization and management (e.g., Fligstein, 1993; Mason, 1958; Mizruchi & Marshall, 2016; Sahlin-Andersson & Engwall, 2002).³

Dimensions of Hyper-Management

Hyper-management moves beyond the administrative focus of the long post-War rise of organization theory and the earlier depictions of

centralized and technical control. Neither bureaucratic authority nor scientific management, hyper-management assumes the empowered status of individual and organizational “actors” in the contemporary world. It can be characterized along two main dimensions: First, expanded purposes, so goals are now imagined as the autonomous choices and decisions of organized actors. Management discourse comes to emphasize entrepreneurship, intrapreneurship, innovation, and vision across sectors, at all levels of the organizational hierarchy, and indeed entirely outside any formal organization (Alt & Craig, 2016; Davis & White, 2015; Mair & Marti, 2006). A second dimension is expanded leadership: hyper-managers are to unify and lead other empowered internal and external actors, not subordinates.⁴ At the extreme, they enable subordinates to become leaders. Leadership/followership dichotomies erode (DeRue & Ashford, 2010) and management theories come to emphasize “soft” interpersonal skills more than the formal chain of command or substantive expertise.

Expanded purposes: vision, innovation, and entrepreneurship

The empowered status of individual and organizational actors expands the organization’s purposes—hyper-managers carry and enact these expanded goals. Innovation, entrepreneurship, designs, strategies, creativity, and change-making enact or display the enlarged managerial role. Market demands do not bloodlessly determine goals, and the means to achieve them do not stem directly from efficiency-based, machine-like processes. Instead, under hyper-management, means and ends are linked to the choices and decisions of empowered individuals. Moreover, because organizations become hyper-organizations incorporating collateral social functions (deriving from human rights, the environment, or obligations to a larger array of stakeholders in globalized comparisons), management can no longer focus only on narrow purposes, such as building a university for teaching and research or a firm for amassing profits. Hyper-management requires attention to

a wider range of goals and inventing ways of integrating them; it calls for decision-making beyond rationalities focused on narrow purposes. For example, university leaders need to show that, beyond teaching and research, they care about being green, contributing to local economies, ensuring the social and emotional well-being of their students and staff, and contributing to diversity and equality. Central management roles proliferate in more domains, as seen in the expansion of the C-suite (Svejenova & Alvarez, 2017); firms now have chief diversity officers, chief sustainability officers, chief innovation officers, chief risk officers, chief strategy officers, chief knowledge officers, and more. The culturally defined technical core becomes a broad vision of what could be achieved, often in a global context, rather than what an organization does instrumentally in a limited environment.

Expanded purposes cut across geographic regions and sectors, sometimes very distant from local realities. For example, in June 2016 the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) launched an entrepreneurship training program in South Sudan. Within a year, over 100 men and women had participated in the program, aiming to launch ventures in a range of sectors including vegetable and poultry farming, printing and photocopying, hairdressing, logistics, IT services, engineering, construction, transportation, and public services. The UNDP reports, "Using Harvard-based methodology, [the training] comprises of a series of ten key 'Personal Entrepreneurial Competencies' represented by thirty behaviors that characterize successful entrepreneurs worldwide" (UNDP, 2017a). The program assumes that entrepreneurial behaviors consist of a universal set of traits that can be taught anywhere to anyone. This can be imagined in unexpected contexts like South Sudan, where in 2018 over 80 percent of the population lived on less than one US dollar per day, illiteracy rates topped 70 percent, and over 40 percent of the population was severely food-insecure (UNDP, 2017b). Under hyper-management, more people in more contexts are imbued with the authority and capability to pursue an

expanded range of self-determined purposes, regardless of the odds of success.

Expanded leadership: control beyond formal authority

Beyond broadened purposes, the empowered and sacralized status of individual and organizational actors influences ideas of leadership. Hyper-management is leadership capability over and above formal authority or substantive expertise. The skilled hyper-manager is expected to inspire and unify diverse internal and external stakeholders in support of a vision. Coordination of empowered actors is not best accomplished through hard power and coercive authority, exercised, for example, in monitoring and assigning tasks. Instead, hyper-managers are to employ deeply personal "soft" skills with charismatic dimensions, such as collaboration, communication, negotiation, and inspiration. Leadership training becomes more central and takes on a quasi-spiritual flavor promoting self-discovery. For example, the business school INSEAD offers an online executive education course in "Leadership Communication with Impact." The executive will learn to understand "a personal communication style. . . in the process discovering more about" him/herself. As another example, a recent posting for a Director of Global Food Programs at Google says the employee will be tasked with "creating food experiences that promote collaboration and engage and energize Googlers each and every day" (The Ladders, 2018). As stated in the posting, the right person needs to be a "great communicator who is comfortable taking on complex projects with a diverse set of stakeholders." The Director will be "working closely with global stakeholders and business leaders, as well as vendor partners, industry experts and thought leaders to define and deliver high impact projects and programs, inspiring and mobilizing your team." Under hyper-management, organizational leadership can require an internal journey to tap into one's own authentic values and personal style in order to inspire others; the ability to create and execute an effective

plan that efficiently allocates human resources is not enough.

In hyper-management discourse one's position in the organization's hierarchy does not determine one's capacity or potential for leadership (in theory if not in practice). The practitioner literature now valorizes the claim that anyone can become a leader if they develop "soft" skills of inspiration. "Person not position" is a common mantra (Quinn, 1996; DeRue & Ashford, 2010). For example, an industry blog post for mid-level compliance and ethics officers discusses how they can be successful if they develop "superpowers," showing a picture of a man in a suit with a cape. The powers include convincing top management to keep the organization going in "the right direction" and being able to "take over other people's minds." "Much of the job," the blogger writes, "is about the ability to persuade, even to persuade adversaries" (Turteltaub, 2015). Hyper-management assumes the possibility of influencing those higher up on the traditional organizational chart. Along the same lines, a *Forbes* article proposes that "everyone is a leader, and everyone is CEO of his or her career" (Ryan, 2016). Other sectors echo these beliefs. A nonprofit career development and employment website advises:

Leadership doesn't mean having a fancy title and lots of supervisees. Leaders stand out not only for their individual contributions, but also for their ability to inspire others, create a sense of community, and to help organizations weather difficult storms. Opportunities to lead are everywhere, and can be taken advantage of from any part of an organization. (Kane, 2014)

Both internal and external stakeholders, understood as empowered actors, participate in decision-making. For example, a widely used template for non-routine decisions (e.g., vision planning or major policy changes) solicits broad-based input from all levels of an organization and all stakeholders (see practical handbooks providing advice to managers, such as Wellins, 1991). The shift from hierarchical to

participatory decision-making may make organizations more democratic (Battilana, Fuerstein, & Lee, 2016); the organizations are to delegate "voice rights" (Turco, 2016) and "decision rights" (Hsieh, 2005; Kerr, 2004; Moriarty, 2010). By some accounts broad-based input may contribute to optimal decisions (Turco, 2016). The solicitation of input might also be mainly symbolic, aimed at generating buy-in for pre-made decisions or pursued simply to conform to dominant professional advice.

Cultural Bases of Hyper-Management

Future empirical studies can show the rise of dimensions of hyper-management, and help to explain its causes. Some realists see hyper-management as a product of enhanced competition, often in more global markets for employees or customers (Aghion, Bloom, Blundell, Griffith, & Howitt, 2005). Others link hyper-management to functional advancements in technology or other aspects of globalization such as international mobility (Acedo & Jones, 2007). Still others point to environmental complexity in a realist vein, as reflections of "actual" relationships of economic and political power and global interdependencies (e.g., Davis, 2009). These discussions make a good deal of sense, often emphasizing the pressures produced by inconsistent, conflicting, and multiple environments. But they do not account for a broad cultural shift, across national contexts and social sectors, toward hyper-managerial myths of empowerment beyond function. In contrast to realist arguments, we see the rise of hyper-management through a neo-institutional lens.

Hyper-management stems most immediately from the neoliberal cultural ideologies formed in the 1980s and widely adopted in the 1990s, as well as from the expanded hyper-organization of the period (Bromley & Meyer, 2015; compare Ruggie, 1982 and 1998, for a contrast between earlier "embedded liberalism" and neoliberalism). As used here, the term "neoliberalism" refers to an ideology with broad social,

cultural, and political dimensions that valorize a society constructed by actors (individuals, but also organizations). This understanding of neoliberalism reaches far beyond the economic policies associated with the term.

The fall of the Soviet Union left no global challenge to liberal assertions of how best to structure national societies, polities, and economies, as well as the whole international system. American-style liberalism, a potent force since the end of World War II (Djelic, 1998), became hegemonic neoliberalism in an increasingly interdependent global society that had reached, in some formulations, “the end of history” (Fukuyama, 1992). Neoliberalism further undercut the primordial authority, though not the organizational elaboration, of nation-states, already weakened substantially by the disasters of the first half of the twentieth century (Rhodes, 1994). Neoliberals considered centralized state control as an unwelcome disruption of market efficiency, if not a menacing source of oppression and corruption. So public agencies were re-invented as potentially efficient and effective organizations if reformed through privatization, decentralization, and deregulation (Brunsson & Sahlin-Andersson, 2000; Christensen & Læg Reid, 2006). In practice, state organizational structures expanded during the whole period, just as organizations in general did (Bromley & Meyer, 2015). What declined was the charismatic authority of the national state (Strange, 1996), given global rationalization: organization tended to replace sovereignty. A core effect, central to our argument, is that myths of charisma tended to shift downward, constructing hyper-organization and hyper-management.

According to neoliberal cultural principles, world progress depended on the rational choices of individuals and the organizations they freely built.⁵ As empowered (and presumably rational) individuals vote and consume and produce and associate with minimal interference, their legitimate choices constitute economies, government policies, and societies. A neoliberal society re-visions and re-constructs individuals (e.g., through rapidly rising levels of education) as reasonable and responsible actors *en masse*

(Meyer & Jepperson, 2000). The contemporary postmodern individual is imagined as an exceptionally empowered actor—able and entitled to pursue goals on a global scale and responsible for social progress (Boli & Thomas, 1997; Drori et al., 2006; Elliott, 2007; Frank & Meyer, 2002). For example, entrepreneurship becomes appropriate for microloan operations in Bangladesh, as well as a pursuit of elite American capitalists Cosic, 2017; (DeCarolis, 2014; Pozen, 2008). And the men and women of Davos are imagined to be able to improve the world through co-creation and collaboration (World Economic Forum, 2018). This, formerly hubris or fantasy, comes to be seen as purposive, responsible, and legitimate social action. The rise of empowered actorhood and the decline of more collective bases of order enabled the explosion of hyper-management.

Arising out of a neoliberal cultural ideology, hyper-management is a discourse containing a theory of action and set of aspirations for organizations and management that assumes actors are (or should be) massively empowered; it is only partly a functional reality. Participants in local contexts variably put dominant discourse into practice (Garud, Gehman, & Giuliani, 2014; Garud, Gehman, & Tharchen, 2018). Thus neo-institutional cultural arguments best explain the spread of hyper-management around the world and across sectors, and its concentration in a particular time period. In an empirical study, we would expect expansion of hyper-management far beyond changes in technological access, international mobility, or competition.

Actorhood of internal and external stakeholders

Globalized neoliberalism expands the legitimated range of social actors and social action, often to supra-national levels of coordination and competition. Huge numbers of people are accorded empowerment and rationality; they build and expand structures—hyper-organizations—that are equally empowered and rational autonomous actors, rather than servants of controlling sovereigns (King et al., 2010; Krücken

& Meier, 2006; Pollman, 2011). This expansion of actorhood among internal and external stakeholders generates hyper-management.

Externally, actors generate pressures such as organizational demonstrations of corporate social responsibility that extend around the world (Höllerer, 2013; Lim & Tsutsui, 2012); proper hyper-managers should respond.⁶ Beyond corporate responsibility, the increasingly actor-laden environment creates demands for hyper-managers on a growing array of fronts. For example, leaders now routinely produce press releases that not only share accomplishments related to core occasions, but also public positions on nearly any major event—in both profit-motivated organizations and those with other missions. For example, in August 2017, University of Pennsylvania President Amy Gutmann released the following statement regarding a demonstration in Charlottesville:

The racism, anti-Semitism, and other bigotry expressed by the neo-Nazi, KKK and other white supremacist groups that demonstrated in Charlottesville are deeply abhorrent and call for universal condemnation. The hatred espoused is inimical to any decent society and anathema to the most fundamental ideals of our University. (University of Pennsylvania, 2017)

Similar to Gutmann and many other executives, Apple CEO Tim Cook responded to events in Charlottesville. Cook stated,

I disagree with the president and others who believe that there is a moral equivalence between white supremacists and Nazis, and those who oppose them by standing up for human rights. Equating the two runs counter to our ideals as Americans. (Pham, 2017)

In the same vein, by external cultural fiat, an organization might “need” someone who knows about environmental standards in order to be properly green, or a chief inclusion officer or chief diversity officer to spearhead equity initiatives. Hyper-management arises to determine how the environmental or diversity roles might relate to other units, or to an organizational bottom line.

Internally, under the neoliberal cultural system, hyper-managers re-imagine employees as actors. Hyper-managers are to embrace a holistic vision of employees and take their actual or potential goals seriously. For example, in 2017, Ben Congleton, CEO of a private and relatively small software company called Olark, was celebrated in news headlines around the world for responding positively to an employee’s message asking for two days off to “focus on [her] mental health.” Congleton replied,

“Hey Madalyn, I just wanted to personally thank you for sending emails like this. Every time you do, I use it as a reminder of the importance of using sick days for mental health—I can’t believe this is not standard practice at all organizations. You are an example to us all, and help cut through the stigma so we can all bring our whole selves to work” (Dishman 2017).

As another example, hyper-managers are supposed to formally support employees’ myriad identities and hobbies in firm-based affinity groups. Employee resource groups (ERGs) proliferate (Briscoe & Safford, 2010; Welbourne, Rolf, & Schlachter, 2015). And employees can become social intrapreneurs (Alt & Craig, 2016; Davis & White, 2015). Hyper-managers treat employees and clients as partners and collaborators who have their own legitimate goals. With all these changes, something much more than routine administrative management and imperative authority is envisioned.

Feedback: Hyper-Organization and Hyper-Management

Both hyper-organization and hyper-management reflect the dominance of neoliberal cultural doctrines. But they also drive each other, ideologically and perhaps organizationally: they coexist in a mutually supportive feedback loop. The number, type, and authority of an organization’s internal and external stakeholders increase (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Freeman, Harrison, Wicks, Parmar, & De Colle, 2010; Lok, Hwang, & Höllerer, 2016), creating more elaborate and complex institutional environments (Greenwood, Raynard,

Kodeih, Micelotta, & Lounsbury, 2011).⁷ In response, hyper-organizations legitimately represent a growing range of interests, including actual (and imagined) global markets with wide arenas of both competition and cooperation. In general, many scholars observe an “increasing prevalence” of multi-logic or hybrid organizations that incorporate multiple, sometimes conflicting, purposes (Pache & Santos, 2010, p. 471; Battilana & Lee, 2014; Bromley & Meyer, 2017). Imagining how all the parts of hyper-organizations, including all the empowered stakeholders, fit together and contribute to a shared purpose requires hyper-management beyond routine administrative skills. Organizational complexities beyond visible functional relationships produce images and postures of expanded and charismatic leadership.

But causal effects occur in the other direction, too. Over time, charismatic hyper-management comes to be routinized in expanded organizational structure, as in Weber’s (1947/1922) classic analysis of the “routinization of charisma.” Data and measurement stabilize the incorporation of broad purposes and the creation of strategies used to achieve them: measures of input, output, outcomes, impact, and participant performance and satisfaction.⁸ For example, an organization can now calculate the benefits of free fruit juice for its employees, as well as the value of training employees about proper diet. In nonprofit organizations, elaborate “theories of change” and “logic models” become the gold standard for steering the organizational ship (Funnell & Rogers, 2011). Charismatic visions are transformed into concrete departments and programs of planning, strategy, and mission. For individuals, expanded leadership is built into programs emphasizing broad participation in decision-making, and into enlarged human resource programs. Business schools and executive education programs expand to include courses and programs on strategy and leadership, distant from the “hard” fields of accounting and finance. But hyper-management training also institutionalizes the charismatic dimensions: it emphasizes systematic methods of decision-making built around quantified technologies, the pursuit of

vision is systematized, and leadership involving the empowerment of self and others is taught as a professionalization matter. With the institutionalization of hyper-management, one can now take charisma-improvement classes and hire executive coaches for support. Hyper-management ideals and practices, once institutionalized, further expand hyper-organization.

Implications

It is difficult to justify hyper-management purely in instrumental terms. As an example, consider the explosion of hyper-managerial efforts and roles that have arisen around corporate social responsibility, which have emerged despite widespread knowledge that the link between forms of corporate social responsibility and profit is ambiguous (Endrikat, Guenther, & Hoppe, 2014). CSR spreads even more ambiguously beyond firms to the nonprofit world where organizations already pursue social missions, yet sign on to various agreements such as the Global Compact (Pope, Bromley, Lim, & Meyer, 2018). Additionally, in a performative twist (e.g., Mackenzie, 2008), even if a link between corporate social responsibility and profit comes to exist, one cause may be the changing context defining what proper organizations ought to do rather than an inherent relationship between social responsibility and profit.

The expanded actorhood of hyper-management can also create new problems that undercut functionality.⁹ At the macro level, Lamm (2017) warns of the volatility and potential dangers of an economy that is overly dependent on entrepreneurship: “We shouldn’t want everyone to be an entrepreneur. It’s not about separating the professionals from the amateurs, either. It’s about responsible approaches to economic growth and societal change.” At the organization level, hyper-management undercuts clear organizational charts and requires strong social controls and self-discipline for cohesion. When these controls break down, turmoil ensues. For instance, Google has long encouraged open employee discussion through its message boards,

similar to the principles of openness and voice described in Turco's (2016) "conversational firm." As of 2017, there were about 87,000 Google discussion groups to allow employees to express themselves, criticize products or policies, or protest decisions by management. But encouraging participation creates new managerial problems when espoused views violate social norms. As reported in the *New York Times*, Mr. Damore, a software engineer,

argued biological factors helped explain the shortage of female engineers and leaders in Silicon Valley. . . . Google said he had crossed the line "by advancing harmful gender stereotypes" and many employees were upset about the views outlined in the memo. . . . Mr. Damore said the company's biases created "a politically correct monoculture that maintains its hold by shaming dissenters into silence". (Wakabayashi, 2017)

At the individual level, hyper-management can produce stresses, as regular people are pressed to posture as heroic leaders: liberal society is famously an engine of anxiety or narcissism rather than depression or modesty (Espeland & Sauder, 2016).

There is little evidence that the ultimate hyper-managers—CEO superstars—generate positive effects (Khurana, 2002; Malmendier & Tate, 2009). But the rise of hyper-management does help solve a puzzle in contemporary organization theory: why we see increasing CEO pay and status in the face of the reduced autonomy generated by increased stakeholder pressure and competition (Mizruchi & Marshall, 2016). Observers usually attribute the outsized salaries and celebrity status of top executives to their power and self-interest, as inquiry has trouble finding functional justifications.¹⁰ In our view, beyond raw power, the cultural celebration of hyper-management legitimates and elevates the status of executives. Hyper-managers to whom leadership and vision are assigned, under conditions of actual opaqueness and uncertainty, are thus valorized (and paid) excessively. Massive salaries reflect and reinforce the notion that top management does, or can or should do, something very special.

Beyond questions of effectiveness, hyper-management raises issues of justice and equality. For example, while hyper-management considers explicit coercion illegitimate, it relies on strong social control. The globalization of hyper-management constructs a worldwide elite with expansive vision and leadership, but out of touch with local and national realities, as in Huntington's (2004) critiques of the "Davos Man." Critics increasingly view neoliberalism and its attendant assumptions about rational individual and organizational action as a failed theory; even the mainstream economists who aggressively pushed neoliberal policies via the World Bank and IMF report that the benefits of neoliberal capitalism have been "oversold" (Ostry, Loungani, & Furceri, 2016). Neoliberalism has the potential to enhance arbitrary and uncontrolled authority and power by individual and organizational actors. Around the world, organizational leaders take private actions that have sweeping social and economic consequences but lack collective political or economic oversight. Sometimes this "disruption" is celebrated, but other times it comes with dramatically negative effects—including much (however heroic) failure. The arbitrariness in hyper-management discourse invites obvious delegitimizing reactions, sometimes with the qualities of populism.

Research agenda

Our arguments point to a research program with three central foci: (a) to assess the rise and character of hyper-management, (b) to explain it, and (c) to consider its consequences.

(a) Table 1 spells out a range of research settings that could empirically assess the rise of hyper-management and establish its core dimensions. For instance, content analyses could systematically study a dichotomy in some of today's business literature, which celebrates hyper-managers (called "leaders") rather than technical administrators (called "managers"). An article in *Harvard Business Review* (Nayar, 2013), for example, provides "three tests that will help you decide if you've made the shift from managing people to leading them." According to the article,

Table 1. Illustrative arenas for testing hypotheses about hyper-management.

<i>Executive education</i>	In the same way that the expanded array of rather standardized business schools reflects basic organizational structure, expanded elite executive education schemes reflect the special status of the hyper-manager. These educational arrangements now tend to celebrate leadership and entrepreneurial vision: executive education programs offer programs in glamorous hyper-management. Instruction goes beyond valuing managerial effectiveness, and emphasizes the development of the self and the capacity for innovation and change. A study can examine both the expansion of executive education, and changes in its content over time.
<i>General administrative education</i>	The properties of hyper-managerialism show up, more routinized, in the curricula of ordinary education, too. Over time, departments have expanded beyond traditional core areas. In the current period, programs explicitly structured around “leadership” and “entrepreneurship” or “innovation” grow and diffuse. These emphases expand in business schools, but increasingly may also be found in programs in public policy, public administration, and education.
<i>Job descriptions</i>	Job definitions and announcements change as workers are re-imagined as partly hyper-managerial. Any role depiction becomes more likely to emphasize both leadership and capacity for creative innovation, even for roles formerly seen as more passive. Integration and innovation are now to come from persons, not structures. Jobs are depicted as requiring higher-order skills, suitable for empowered actors, and illustrate the need to include the interests of other stakeholders. Emphases on substantive or technical knowledge may decline.
<i>Consulting tasks</i>	The widespread expansion of consulting arrangements has often been noted. The arguments here suggest that increasingly such arrangements focus, not on technical improvements in organizations, but on hyper-managerial issues: coordinating and integrating systems now filled with legitimated “actors,” and constructing broad visions of organizational meaning and purpose.
<i>Guru literature</i>	Hortatory literatures have been prominent. Guru books have increased over time, and increasingly focus on hyper-managerial issues: leading people, finding one’s inner creativity and entrepreneurship, and so on. If everyone can be a leader, then everyone might be interested in how to be a leader. Similarly, books on creativity do well. In contrast, advice on instrumental effectiveness may decline.
<i>Academic literature</i>	The academic business literature may increasingly attend to the core dimensions of hyper-managerialism. Innovation and entrepreneurship get much celebratory attention, even in routinized ways. And so do the qualities associated with “leadership.” Concerns with traditional managerial roles—organizational efficiency and effectiveness, for example—seem to get less attention than in the past.

leadership involves creating value, expanding one’s circle of influence (i.e., over people outside the formal hierarchy), and motivating and enabling others. In contrast, management is characterized as counting value, relying on lines of power (i.e., formal reporting structures), and controlling others with authority. The article claims that “influence and inspiration separate leaders from managers, not power and control.” The *Wall Street Journal Guide to Management* sets up a similar contrast between leadership and management—leaders innovate versus imitate, disrupt

the status quo versus accept it, advance originality versus playing good soldier, do the right thing versus doing things right, focus on people rather than structures, inspire trust rather than exercise control, and keep an eye on the horizon rather than the bottom line (Murray, 2010). In these depictions, hyper-managers are charismatic, innovative entrepreneurs and leaders, while regular managers are guardians of administration. Hyper-managers heroically risk, and experience, failure (Hall, 2007). Regular managers conservatively defend against it.

More broadly, analyses of prescriptive literature for management and leadership over time would be valuable. Studies can examine the proliferation of advice about how best to “do” leadership that reflects the hyper-management spirit and the possible decline of more scientific management formulations. For example, “transformational leadership,” an early manifestation of hyper-management intended to inspire and motivate a team (see Burns, 1978 and Bass, 1985; later Bass, 1990; Bass & Riggio, 2006), contrasts with earlier discussions of transactional or managerial leadership that emphasize supervision and performance. Recent descriptions of leadership more strongly express hyper-management: distributed leadership, collaborative leadership, and emotional leadership emphasize horizontal forms of authority and holistic attunement to individuals’ specific skills and needs (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2013; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Harris, 2009; Humphrey, 2002; Spillane, 2012).

A related set of questions could consider how older and newer management discourses relate. As hyper-management has proliferated, have alternatives—especially scientific management and imperative authority—declined? It may be difficult to imagine a retention or reassertion of traditional top-down authority, though contemporary global political authoritarianism reminds us of the possibilities. Perhaps new management ideologies do not displace old ones but rather combine or layer. Or, if there are widespread retreats from the neoliberalism and globalization of the current period, with corresponding declines in the growth of hyper-organization and hyper-management, is there a return to prior modes of management?

(b) A second line of research can try to explain why, where, and when hyper-management emerged. As a core empirical hypothesis, we expect indicators of hyper-management to increase worldwide and across sectors, especially in concert with neoliberalism’s rise. Our arguments suggest that, in a globalized neoliberal context, the trend toward hyper-management is part of an evolutionary process that

generates change in the same direction in many different locales, in contrast to predictions of deep cross-national differences (Guillén, 1994). Although we posit a general trend towards hyper-management in many locales over time, there are also substantial cross-sectional differences at any given moment in time regardless of longitudinal trajectories. For instance, there is variation in managerial discretion around the world (Crossland & Hambrick, 2011); more discretion or status may indicate increased hyper-management. Our arguments suggest that hyper-management will be greater in countries—like the Anglo-American ones—more closely tied to liberalism, and in social sectors (e.g., higher education) more exposed to social and economic markets and penetrated by neoliberal ideology. These contexts likely generate the expanded actorhood of internal and external stakeholders that we view as generating hyper-management discourse.

One could study longitudinal and cross-national variation in job descriptions to see whether and where management or employees are increasingly expected to seek maximum professional growth and take initiative rather than play defined roles or follow orders. To illustrate, an entry-level job description for a coding position at Houston Methodist Hospital in Texas requires “typing at least 40 words per minute” and a two-year associate degree. It also contains a section of features called “Growth/Innovation,” noting that the potential hire: “Displays initiative to improve relative to job function. Contributes ideas to help improve quality of coding data and abstracting data” (Indeed.com, 2017). Thus, even technical, entry-level employees can lead organizational improvement. An alternative account might argue that these expectations of an employee are not linked to hyper-management, but rather a component of the Japanese system of manufacturing preferred in the 1980s, vested in a communal understanding of each person as part of a whole. Empirical studies could compare the prevalence of descriptions such as this one in the United States in recent decades relative to Japan in the 1980s.

(c) Third, empirical studies can consider the instrumental and institutional consequences of hyper-management postures. We are skeptical of a direct causal relationship between hyper-management and better organizational or individual performance, although conforming to dominant discourse may bring benefits over and above instrumental considerations. In any case, there are diffuse and unintended consequences of managerial practices and doctrines beyond effectiveness or efficiency. Perhaps hyper-management, under contemporary conditions, leads to more standing with internal or external stakeholders (apart from instrumental gains for an organization). Perhaps workplaces under hyper-management experience greater numbers of internal (or external) legal challenges, human resource issues, and other conflicts. Maybe they have difficult and more time-consuming decision-making processes.

Our arguments contribute to the development of organization theory in several ways. They follow on the neo-institutional theme that organizational structuration and expansion reflect environmental rationalization. We observe that this rationalization has expanded and globalized dramatically in the recent neoliberal period as a generalized theory of world progress produced by individual and organizational actors. This has encouraged massive expansions of domestic and international organizational structuration (Bromley & Meyer, 2015) and extraordinary codifications of individual and organizational managerial capabilities—often far beyond reasonable and practicable possibilities. Thus contemporary organizational theories and models—formulated, we argue, to provide idealized descriptions of a progressive (though stateless) global society—attribute unrealistic heroic and charismatic capacities for management.

Our framework jointly explains phenomena that have exploded in recent decades but are often treated as somehow natural or functional, and are treated as distinct, such as entrepreneurship, innovation, and leadership. Our cultural account also provides boundary conditions for when and where we are most likely to see

hyper-management—a neoliberal cultural context—and suggests when and where these conditions might be weaker or decline. The scope of our arguments applies to discursive and normative celebrations of hyper-management, with only a loose relationship to practices (let alone outcomes). Decoupling between doctrinally preferred discourses and practices explains why hyper-management might be distant from, or ritualized within, practices (Bromley & Powell, 2012; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Hyper-management arises in the globalizing neoliberal context as a theory of collective order and progress: it is not necessarily formulated to be realistic, and is likely to be greatly decoupled from practice and outcomes. The theory of the heroic hyper-managerial entrepreneur as an account of progress in global society is far from the mundane world of the mom-and-pop store. In this case, as in others, organization theories arise as ideologies serving functions beyond empirically realistic analysis. They are cognitive and normative visions as much as reflections of ongoing practice in a nominally “real” world, and are promulgated as such in business and professional schools. The stories of rational progress they tell have mythic functions (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). In the present case, they are accounts with worldwide scope of progress in often-global society, far removed from local circumstances.

Concluding Comments

During neoliberalism’s pursuit of a rationalized global society inhabited by empowered human actors, organizations, growing beyond narrow functions, have become hyper-organizations. The creation of hyper-organizations contributes to the rise of hyper-management, which reflects empowered actors in complex contexts. And the current wave of hyper-management leads to still more hyper-organization as it becomes institutionalized in organizations and training programs. On one hand, hyper-management is a cultural theory of participatory integration and rational collective action. On the other hand, it also supports an elite—now at the global

level—and is easy to attack as lacking real accountability, or effective political, economic, or cultural controls. A culture that encourages an elite to lead others beyond rationality or responsibility (and indeed to glorify failure and disruption; Hall, 2007), is likely to be problematic.

The hyper-manager has universal qualities transcending basic functional requirements—a good one can supposedly manage anything anywhere. Abstract vision and leadership skills replace concrete knowledge and experience. The manager of a paper company may no longer need to know what a tree is. The Director of Google's Food Programs, from our earlier example, needs experience in strategy, marketing, operations or management consulting; understanding food is not a necessary qualification. Hyper-organizations take this abstraction to an extreme level: a paper company may no longer make paper but may have a broader set of functions and a larger C-suite.

Before the neoliberal era, the concrete functions of the various social forms—families, churches, tribes, charities, universities, businesses, or government agencies—made them seem incommensurate. Managing them required specific substantive competencies. Strategies used in one domain made no sense in another. Understanding different social forms as standardized organizations, and therefore as generalized actors, rendered them comparable (Bromley & Meyer, 2017). Today, one can discuss a modern hyper-organization that is engaged in activities such as marketing, branding, sales, and governance, and that practices accountability, transparency, responsibility, and risk management, without knowing what it does. Hyper-organizations require hyper-management, which similarly applies principles—such as innovation, vision, evaluation, leadership, communication, and inclusion—regardless of the organization's concrete functions or who is being managed.

Hyper-management may encourage risky expressions of grandiose leadership, seen from critical points of view as expressions of elite power. Thus, hyper-management is unstable, easily criticized as elitist or violating formal

authority. This creates obvious legitimacy problems: it is easy to reconceive heroes as villains or fools (Klapp, 1962). But, as neoliberalism weakens, we may observe less rapid hyper-organizational and hyper-managerial expansion. Implausible entrepreneurial visions and outsized leadership pretenses might very well fall away from the center of discourse—or even become stigmatized, as in prior eras.

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ORCID iD

John W. Meyer  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5581-9038>

Notes

1. The term "models", as used in hyper-management or managerial and organizational theory, refers to discursive manifestations that reflect an underlying dominant cultural paradigm, doctrine, or ideology. There is not a single, unified "hyper-managerial model," but rather a collection of culturally related models, strategies, values, and beliefs. Models are ideals, or aspirational and normative prescriptions, which only sometimes shape direct practice and outcomes. Similarly, "scientific management" is a discourse associated with a host of specific models or strategies, such as cost-benefit analyses, incentives programs, and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, which partially shape actual practices and outcomes.

2. Much realist theory tends to underemphasize the role of culture, and overemphasizes rational, scientific action, a priori individual interests, and raw power relations (Wachhaus, 2014). In some views, managers act as stewards (Davis, Schoorman, & Donaldson, 1997). In others, managers are self-interested agents (Bebchuk & Fried, 2005; Sørensen, 2000) requiring incentives to properly align their interests (Jensen & Meckling, 1976; for a review see Eisenhardt, 1989, and more recently an evaluation by Lok et al., 2016). Alternatively, Barley and Kunda (1992) see historical waves of fashion that vacillate between normative and rational emphases in management. Beyond firms, scholarship in public administration emphasize principal-agent problems in all sorts of structures (e.g., Cook & Wood, 1989; Weingast, 1984).
3. Management strategies are generally thought to stem from pre-existing resource dependencies (e.g., executives aim to meet shareholder demands or maximize employee productivity). From a neo-institutional perspective, we consider why changes to these conditions themselves occur. For example, why do being environmentally friendly or providing a snack bar for employees come to be seen as ways to maximize productivity? See Brandtner and Bromley (2021) on the rise of “win-win” discourse in firms; or studies of diversity practices in US firms (Dobbin, Kim, & Kalev, 2011; Kalev, Dobbin, & Kelly, 2006).
4. We use the term “hyper-manager” rather than “leader” because our full conceptualization extends beyond the leader–manager dichotomy to include enlarged capacities for purposive vision and action. We also wish to distinguish our social scientific analysis from the normative leadership literature.
5. Of course, neoliberalism itself emerges from an older liberal tradition involving the expansion of the rights of individuals (Lauren, 2011). But these retained a more “embedded” flavor (Ruggie, 1982), and a suspicion of the dangers of private organization. Since the end of World War II more types of people are endowed with more rights (e.g., on grounds of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, language, age). The rights then shifted focus from passive entitlements linked to the nationstate to active political, economic, and social powers belonging to all humans (Elliott, 2007; Marshall, 1964; Stacy, 2009). Especially in recent decades, belief in the human capability to rationally plan and control progress on all fronts—economic, political, social—expanded. To institutionalize the faith involved, education exploded worldwide (Meyer, Ramirez, & Soysal, 1992; Schofer & Meyer, 2005). And the social sciences blossomed as discourses for rationalized non-state action (Drori & Moon, 2006; Frank & Gabler, 2006).
6. Corporate responsibility has a history long before the 1990s (e.g., Andrews, 1972), but CSR expands most rapidly during the neoliberal era (Lim & Tsutsui, 2012).
7. Unrationalized environmental complexity is unlikely to generate expansive managerial forms—retreat to bureaucracy or local community are more common responses. But in the contemporary world, complexities on many dimensions are highly rationalized around constructed standards and markets—well represented by organizations and lawyers and accountants.
8. This application of quasi-scientific methods to administration is a means of governance in response to expanded cultural standards, over and above any reflection of obvious functional calculations (Foucault, 1991; Miller & Rose, 2008; Rasche & Seidl, 2019). Quantification and commensuration render activities as visible and concrete, and under control. Financial accounting, for example, now has a relatively institutionalized rule structure. But accounting for social responsibility can still come in many forms. Over time, routinization may stabilize this.
9. Centralized systems of social control can sometimes generate efficiency and effectiveness compared with a social order of empowered individuals making exaggerated claims (Kornberger, Meyer, Brandtner, & Höllner, 2017).
10. Evidence suggests some negative consequences—when “CEO superstars” are distracted from their work by maintaining a public persona, or embrace tendencies towards narcissism and excessive risk-taking (Khurana, 2002; Malmendier & Tate, 2009; see Fligstein, 1993).

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Author biographies

Patricia Bromley is Association Professor of Education and, by courtesy, Sociology at Stanford University.

Her research spans a range of fields including organization and management theory, the sociology of education, and public administration and policy. Her work focuses on the historical rise and globalization of a (neo)liberal culture emphasizing rational, scientific thinking and expansive forms of rights, as well as a contemporary weakening of this culture.

John W. Meyer is Professor of Sociology, emeritus, at Stanford University. He has worked on institutional

theory generally (Jepperson & Meyer, Cambridge, 2021), and in the field of organizations. Recent projects are on the impact of globalization (Bromley & Meyer, *Hyper-Organization*, Oxford, 2015), and the university as a global institution (Frank & Meyer, Oxford, 2020). He now studies curricular patterns in education, the expansion of managerialism, and the educational and organizational effects of a global post-liberal order.