

Presentation of the monograph. Managerialism and its influence on the contemporary world: analysis and reflections

Coordinated by

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The world needs steady men like me

To give and take the orders

GENTLE GIANT

The success of managerialist ideas is one of the most salient features of organisational and employment spheres today. These ideas are enshrined in narratives that place management issues at the heart of contemporary concerns. This is not only so in the field of business management but also in other fields such as employment skills, teaching, and even the private realm. Managerialism has spread its mantra of the ‘need for better management’ to absolutely everything, demanding continuous reforms. The end result is that the doctrine has slowly but surely crept into every corner of citizens’ lives. Managerialism not only seeks to boost effectiveness at work but also involves pursuing a mercantilist approach inspired by ‘cost-benefit’ analysis, applying it to an ever-growing list of human activities. This trend is particularly strong in economic, labour, and organisational management fields. In fact, professional life today is proof of the proliferation of evaluation and management mechanisms (QA controls, service assessments, digital surveys, and the like). All these mechanisms supposedly measure the ability to deliver good service and to reach given aims (whether or not these be of a purely business nature). The techniques are built upon new ideas that clearly spring from the business world and that hold unchallenged sway, spawning yet more tools for boosting productivity and performance. This trend reflects a new Neo-Liberal Biopolitics linked to the success of Post-Fordism as a new Regime of Accumulation (Alonso, 2007). Here, one should note that this meaning of management is gaining ever more ground in “today’s discourses” (Alonso and Fernández Rodríguez, 2013a), and is being reproduced in many contexts and institutions. This is fostering a new social imaginary

in which entrepreneurs and other business-oriented souls are coming to represent a new, idealised contemporary subject who struts upon the Neo-Liberal stage upon which the market becomes the only space for organising society (Lazzarato, 2013; Moruno, 2015). While the most archetypal manifestations of these managerial ideas are to be found in the business books that stuff airport bookshops and shopping centres (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2002; Fernández Rodríguez, 2007a; Alonso and Fernández Rodríguez, 2013a, 2013b and 2018), it is clear from the foregoing (and as we shall see, from the following pages) that this discourse has seeped into every sphere (ranging from books on lifestyle to those on the quest for scientific knowledge) and holds great sway in the building of contemporary societies.

The monograph gathers a set of scholarly works taking diverse forms and approaches to yield new analytical perspectives on ‘managerialism’, which has become an odd but proto-typical manifestation of today’s Neo-Liberal Capitalism. By managerialism, we understand the ideology and discourse of those wielding power in companies (whether they call themselves businessmen, executives, directors, managers or middle managers) and whose moral values and practical recommendations are not only taken as guides on how to run firms but also on how to run society (and thus the individuals who make it up). In a nutshell, we speak of the so-called ‘management discourse’ concept (Alonso and Fernández Rodríguez, 2006, 2013a and 2013b; Collins, 2000; Fernández Rodríguez, 2007a; Fernández Rodríguez and Medina-Vicent, 2017; Gantman, 2005; Klikauer, 2015). The discourse tries to foist the same vision and behaviour on all social and economic players in the context of the market economy, which becomes the social sphere’s ‘Ground Zero’. Indeed, the management discourse has undoubtedly become hegemonic in today’s economy, reflecting what some authors such as Boltanski and Chiapello (2002) have defined as “the new spirit of Capitalism”, in which management values are now the system’s ideological kernel. Managerialism usually passes itself off as neutral, technical know-how. Yet it is no coincidence that the root of this discourse lies in the management techniques preached major companies and institutions (business schools, consultants, business gurus: Locke and Spender, 2011; Fernández Rodríguez, 2013). Nevertheless, beneath this thin veneer of objectivity lies an ideological, deeply-biased view whose purpose is to convince people that they must make their lifestyles dance to the needs of the economic system. Meanwhile, the dogma blinds people to the unfair distribution of incomes and profits, marginalising or overlooking other forms of social organisation that could curb the chaotic get-rich-quick mindset that has overtaken most 21st Century markets (Alonso and Fernández Rodríguez, 2013b). Furthermore, the impact of these ideas on social and institutional spheres is remarkable for they not only undermine our Welfare States (Du Gay, 2012) and the classic concept of “working citizenry” (Alonso, 2007) but also play a key role in justifying growing social inequality in this Neo-Liberal Age (Parker, 2002).

Given the pervasiveness of such discourses in constituting the new Neo-Liberal subjectivity (Laval and Dardot, 2013), we felt it was time to give *Debats* readers a monographic edition that reflected critically on the whole managerialist phenomenon. Following the journal’s present organisation in sections, we gathered a set of papers of great interest,

insight and originality, and by both home and international experts. They write from various perspectives, helping the reader discover the impact corporate facets have had on contemporary life. The first section of the monograph, titled Notes contains five papers covering diverse themes. The first of these — by professors David Muñoz-Rodríguez and Antonio Santos Ortega — describes how the discourse on fostering entrepreneurship has become the keystone of EU employment policies in the form of Strategy 2020. Here, one should note that both authors have done an excellent job in laying bare the spreading of the new entrepreneurship ideology — especially among young university students (Santos Ortega, 2014; Muñoz-Rodríguez and Santos Ortega, 2017). ‘Activation’ and ‘entrepreneurship’ are two central pillars in the managerial imaginary (Alonso and Fernández Rodríguez, 2013a) and have been widely used in European policies inspired in the *flexicurity* paradigm (Keune and Serrano Pascual, 2014). The authors use a comparative approach to explore the policies flogging an entrepreneurial spirit in EU Member States, stressing the huge influence the concept of ‘entrepreneurial subject’ has on EU institutions despite its glaring shortcomings in grappling with growing job insecurity. Here, one should note that the concept is one transcending traditional employment policies to constitute a lifestyle. The second paper also focuses on the issue of entrepreneurship but this time it covers highly specific labour practices. María Inés Landa, Gustavo Blázquez, and Cecilia Castro, researchers at the *Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas* (CONICET) [National Council for Scientific and Technical Research], study the adoption of an entrepreneurial lifestyle in leisure service sectors (specifically, in the fitness and children’s entertainment fields). The authors, who are familiar with such analysis (especially Landa, who has published fascinating articles on the role of the body in Post-Fordian Capitalism: Landa, 2014; Landa and Marengo, 2011), contribute studies of great ethnological and discursive value. They conclude that an entrepreneurial attitude is a valuable asset in professionalising these sectors. Nevertheless, they note that employment insecurity in these fields means that workers continue looking for other kinds of jobs.

The third paper in this section focuses on universities — another field in which managerialism has run riot (and whose effects are all too familiar to those working in this setting). The Sociologist Fernando Ampudia de Haro, in his fascinating work of Eliasian inspiration, analyses the codes and processes by which human behaviour is socially embedded (Ampudia de Haro, 2007 and 2010). His paper identifies managerialism’s main spheres of influence in universities, stressing scientific publications. Ampudia de Haro does so by critically analysing the teaching materials used in the courses universities offer their staff. These texts-codes are an ideal source for analysing the new subjectivity demands made on teachers and researchers. The consequences of this model are explored by the author, who warns of the threats they pose to informed scientific debate. The fourth paper in this section is by the researcher Maria Medina-Vicent. She focuses on a specific sub-genre of management literature that is mainly aimed at women and gives them advice on how to manage better and to climb the professional ladder. At the same time, books in this sub-genre build a highly idiosyncratic discourse on what it means to be a woman in a society assigning gender roles and giving no scope for squaring work with family commitments. Medina-Vicent, following on from

several of her earlier studies (Medina-Vicent, 2018), analyses a corpus of management books and shows how in the end, the values and behaviours preached to women reproduce all the old gender stereotypes — something that puts women managers at a disadvantage *vis-à-vis* their male colleagues and thus merely widens the gender gap. The *Notes* section ends with a research paper on management literature. It is by two professors at Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (UAM), Luis Enrique Alonso and Carlos Jesús Fernández Rodríguez. Together, they have written a lot about this subject (Alonso and Fernández Rodríguez, 2006, 2013a and 2013b; Fernández Rodríguez, 2007a and 2011). In their paper, the authors explore a sub-genre of managerial literature that has hitherto received little attention, namely managerial fiction. This embraces novels and fables in which the plot is linked to the work of managers. The audience of these gripping *oeuvres* comprises — as one might expect — corporate directors and middle managers. The stories are largely inspired by the works of the controversial writer Ayn Rand, who is the top author for many American Neo-Liberal politicians and corporate types who share her manipulative view of a world and of characters solely moved by the quest for business success.

The monograph section following Notes is titled *Viewpoints* and features four contributions from guest writers. The first of these is Prof. Ernesto Gantman of Universidad de Buenos Aires, author of major studies on managerialism (Gantman, 2005). He has recently specialised in bibliometric analysis of scholarly output in the Business Administration field (Gantman, 2011; Gantman and Fernández Rodríguez, 2016). His paper reviews what he terms ‘meritocracy fiction’ given that he sees no empirical evidence for today’s society being a meritocracy. He considers that the ‘meritocracy myth’ merely serves to justify today’s social order. The second contribution in this section is by the British professor Martin Parker, one of the leading voices in the Critical Management Studies academic movement (Hassard and Parker, 1993; Parker, 2002 and 2018; on Critical Management Studies, we recommend reading Grey and Willmott, 2005, and Fernández Rodríguez, 2007b and 2017). Parker focuses on the major changes the university world has undergone over the last few decades. His paper is highly critical of the emergence of a Higher Education market in which managers end up controlling universities. These arguments have been broadened in his latest work, *Shut Down the Business School* (Parker, 2018). The third paper in this section is by Prof. David Collins, one of the leading experts on management literature (Collins, 2000 and 2007). In the light of recent political events (specifically, Donald Trump’s electoral victory), Collins shows the links between the present social-political state of affairs and the runaway success of business best-sellers such as *In Search of Excellence* (by Tom Peters and Robert H. Waterman, Jr.). He considers that Trump’s victory will most likely achieve the same as the aforementioned bestseller, which sowed social division in 1980s America. The *Viewpoint* section ends with a commentary by the Uruguayan Sociologist Gabriel Abend on English as the *lingua franca* in the new Higher Education markets. Abend, whose works on corporate morality are indispensable in the analysis of business discourses (Abend, 2014), was kind enough to contribute this delightfully ironic, provocative, scathing paper for this monograph. It is inspired by Swift’s classic tale and is an experiment with a new genre — something that goes hand-in-glove with the aims of a cultural journal such as *Debats*.

This collection of contributions is concluded by an interview with the renowned British Sociologist Paul du Gay, one of today's great scholars in the managerialism field (Du Gay, 1996, 2012; Hall and Du Gay, 2003). In the conversation, Du Gay sets out his vision of the managerialist phenomenon and explores issues of great interest such as: the origins of managerialism; the relationship between managerialism and Neo-Liberalism; the logic of management versus that of bureaucracy; the economic inequality spawned by managerial practices; possible alternatives to managerialism. Finally, we include a review of the book *Estudios críticos de la organización* [Critical Studies of The Organisation] by Colombian professor Rafael Carvajal Baeza (2013), which reveals the growing interest in critical approaches to managerialism in Latin America's academic spheres. As editor of this monograph, I trust that this collection of works will foster a better understanding of managerialism and gives readers the tools he or she needs to make a more critical reading of the messages implicit in today's ubiquitous management discourses.

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