

Dominance of Managers within Organisations

Dr Thomas Diefenbach
Lecturer in Management
University of Strathclyde
Strathclyde Business School
Cathedral Street 199
Glasgow
G4 0QU
United Kingdom
phone: ++44 (0)141 - 553 6154
e-mail: thomas.diefenbach@gsb.st rath.ac.uk

Track 1: Management, Work and Organisation - Persistent and emergent manifestations of managerial control over work and worker resistance

Aim of the paper

When it is about organisations then it is about management – and managers. The organisations of our time are *managerial* organisations, even our societies are *managerial* societies. Management - and discourses about the roles and importance of managers and managing - is part of the prevailing *zeitgeist* of our era. Historically, managers became one of the dominant groups within fairly hierarchical and bureaucratic organisations. However, since the (late) 1980ies managers have managed (sic!) also to dominate within public sector organisations ('New Public Management') and within new, *allegedly* less hierarchical forms of organisations (e.g. with in lean or network organisations, team-based structures). In this sense, even a plethora of different types of organisations and work relationships seems to have brought little change to the persistency of managerial power and control; these have even increased.

Most investigations carried out so far into managers' power and dominance roles have provided 'only' descriptions, analysis, or critique. What we still need is *explanations*, i.e. theoretical concepts for answering the question *why and how managers dominate our organisations to such a great, even increasing extent*.

In this sense, this paper shall contribute to investigate - and explain (!) - the dominance of managers. For this, a multi-dimensional '*theory of social dominance of managers*' shall be developed which is based on three explanatory variables; *power*, *interests*, and *ideology*. These variables themselves need to, and shall be developed as comprehensive, multi-dimensional and interdisciplinary concepts in order to address the complex nature of managers' dominance appropriately.

Theoretical contributions to the field of study

The paper will reveal that the dominance of management and (the roles and activities of) managers are not a set of 'neutral' functions but power-oriented, interest-driven, and ideology-based worldviews and actions of people within institutional settings.

This critical connotation contributes particularly to Critical Management Studies, organisational politics approaches and Social Dominance Theory.

However, contributions within these strands so far have concentrated either on power or ideology or (to a lesser extent) on interests. This paper is a first, at least one of very few attempts to analyse managers' dominance as a *comprehensive and multi-dimensional system of power, interests, and ideology* combined.

Research question(s) and methodology

Why and how do managers dominate our organisations? What is behind managers' superiority and success in the social competition of individuals and groups (within larger organisations)?

The paper is primarily a theoretical one. The whole line of argument developed here can be seen particularly in the tradition of Critical Management Studies, organisational politics approaches, and a more general socio-philosophical reasoning Weberian style. The argument made is sometimes also close to Social Dominance Theory. For more specific discussions it will be referred primarily to multi-dimensional concepts of power, various concepts of ideology and socio-psychological concepts of interests.

Summary of the central argument and key findings

Managers' dominance will be identified as being based on a complex and multi-dimensional system several sources of *power*, their individual and group *interests*, and managerial *ideology*.

For this, it will be shown that managers' power does not only stem from their hierarchical positions and prerogatives, but from institutionalised systems of control as well as internalised values, i.e. it is hegemonic.

Second, a consistent and comprehensive concept of interests will be developed from a socio-philosophical perspective. It will be shown that managers' interests are not only about increasing a company's profit, market share or efficiency but much more about their individual roles and careers, position and influence.

Third, a whole range of ideological tools used by managers will be revealed and it will be demonstrated how these tools together construct reality – even to an extent that management is not recognisable anymore as ideology.

Based on the three theoretical concepts of 'interests', 'power' and 'ideology', the dominance of managers can then be explained by combining the three concepts to a *theory of social dominance of managers based on interests, power, and ideology*. It then can

be also demonstrated that managers can be seen not only as a dominant group within organisations, but as one of 'the' ruling classes in our societies.

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