Human Relations special issue call for papers

The changing nature of managerial work

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Objectives of the special issue

The world of organizations has been transformed over the past twenty years. Firms now face intensified international competition facilitated by developments in information and communications technology (ICT), trade liberalization and interconnectedness through the development of global commodity chains. Against this backcloth, new, more responsive organizational forms have emerged, based on flat, neo-bureaucratic lines, accompanied by delayering, downsizing and concentrating on core activities, as part of a move to neo-bureaucratic organization (Clegg et al., 2011). This has led some commentators to predict that we are now seeing 'the end of management' (Murray, 2010).

In this context, we have arguably witnessed significant changes to managerial work and how it is done (Hassard et al., 2009). This transformation has been reported in both economies dominated by a shareholder-value orientation (i.e., US and UK) and in economies with a stakeholder focus (i.e., Germany and Japan) (Morris et al., 2006; 2008). Across these economies we have seen the rise of neo-liberalism and a consequent focus on shareholder value that appears to have led managers to concentrate on financial issues (Tengblad, 2004; 2006; 2011) and for corporations to favour 'a tyranny of corporate slenderness' (Hales, 2002; 2005; Tyler and Wilkinson, 2007). As a result, changes to managerial work can be seen in increased spans of control, intensified work regimes, longer working hours, reduced promotion opportunities, less career certainty and greater job insecurity. Yet, in some other contexts, the emergence of neo-bureaucratic organizational forms has been accompanied by vertical disintegration necessitating more diffuse methods of managerial control (Clegg, 2011).

Despite these changes to managerial work we still know relatively little about how these changes affect managers and what they do at work. To address the current void in our conversations about managerial work we invite exemplary contributions to address these issues from one or more of the following themes.

Themes to be addressed by this special issue

Three aspects of the changing nature of managerial work are especially worthy of enquiry: First, the new pace of managerial work (working time, work intensification, work–life balance); second, the new environment of managerial work (job security, managerial careers, labour market reform); and third, the new social dynamics of managerial work (job identification, organizational identity, work commitment).

1. Working time, work intensification and work–life balance

Time is a key feature of job quality (Kalleberg, 2011). While the three aspects of working experience are discrete, they are obviously closely related to each other and to the context of organizational change (Kossek et al., 2010). For example, managerial work–life balance is likely to be worse given long work hours and/or work intensification. It has been argued that working hours have increased across western economies (Standing, 2011). And, yet, there is a paradox. On the one hand, qualitative and quantitative research points to increased managerial working time (Burchell et al., 1999; Kalleberg, 2009; Marchington et al., 2004). On the other hand, data point to falling working hours across OECD economies (Warhurst et al., 2008). The paradox may be explained by managerial working hour data being unreliable given the evidence for considerable unpaid overtime.
(Hassard et al., 2009) particularly in a situation where the lines between home and work are increasingly blurred by ICT (Golden and Figart, 2006).

If the data for working hours are contestable, then there is strong evidence that work intensification, particularly for managers, is increasing across OECD economies, thus reflecting that work is now harder and focused on a greater range of tasks (Berg et al., 2004; Green, 2006; Hassard et al., 2009; McGovern et al., 2008). Furthermore, longer working hours and intensification imply a deleterious managerial work–life balance. This is exacerbated by the prevalence of two working couple families (or at least one-and-a-half, Redman et al., 1997). Family time has arguably been 'squeezed' by the increased participation of women in the workforce (Scherer and Steiber, 2007) and by downsizing and delayering in large organizations (Hassard et al., 2009).

2. Job security, managerial careers and labour markets

Job security and managerial careers are intimately related, with stable organizational careers predicated upon labour market security. Again, given widespread organizational restructuring (including downsizing and delayering), increased managerial job insecurity might be expected. Indeed managerial job insecurity has been reported across developed economies (Aronowitz, 2001; Fraser, 2001; Standing, 2011).

There is, however, again a paradox (Littler and Innes, 2004). Macro economic data point to relatively stable long-term employment and tenure rates (Doogan, 2009; Frevé, 2007; Green, 2006; Rodrigues and Guest, 2010). Yet, both Green (2006), who identifies increases in managerial job insecurity, and Hassard and Morris (2015), who show there has been an increase in the prevalence of large firms promoting a message of job insecurity, question the accuracy and applicability of this data. Moreover, others have determined that job insecurity has been used as a way to increase productivity (see also Geppert and Matten, 2006) which suggests that managerial job insecurity is not easily separated from other aspects of managerial work, such as intensification, longer working hours and increased spans of control (Hassard et al., 2009).

Discussions about 'new' careers, which are purportedly 'boundaryless', have gained considerable currency in the literature, but have also come under considerable scrutiny, in that they do not capture the complex interactions between individual agency and structural constraints that circumscribe contemporary organizational experience (King et al., 2005). For example, empirical research points to careers being inevitably bounded (Inkson et al., 2012) and remarkably resilient (Dany et al., 2003; Doogan 2009; Rodrigues and Guest, 2010). Furthermore, Hassard et al. (2009), found a relative lack of career mobility in the US, UK and Japan, in that promotion opportunities were more limited than hitherto, as a consequence of delayering, and with subsequent research indicating a lower degree of organizational attachment (Morris et al., 2015).

3. Job identification, organizational identity and work commitment

We would also expect that a manager's identification with work and their employing organizations would diminish given the organizational changes discussed previously. Factors such as job insecurity, work intensification, long work hours and a diminution of career prospects, can all be seen as contributing to a manager's changing attitudes to work (Beck, 2000; Sennett, 1998). However, at a general level, research does not support this thesis. Doherty (2009), for example, found that work remained important for employees' sense of self, contrary to the 'end of identity' thesis (see also Webb, 2004). Hassard et al. (2009) specifically looked at how managers increasingly pointed to a strong commitment to work despite seemingly negative changes in the organizational environment. How managers identify with their roles and their organizations is currently an under-researched area of managerial work and a site where more understanding is needed beyond simple notions of commitment.

In addition, the success or failure of an organization is often related to the effort and motivation of its employees (Latham and Pinder, 2005). The motivation of employees is often seen as the product of their commitment towards their job or career. As a result, it has been argued – in so-called ‘mainstream’ organizational analysis – that employers have an incentive to ensure that their employees are committed towards the success of the organization and producing at a high level (Noria et al., 2008). Many organizations suggest that their intention is to provide an environment that will foster innovation and collaboration, build a better brand, and promote employees who seek to excel (Lok and Crawford, 2001). Organizational social psychologists, however, have questioned the extent that work commitment is the 'fuel' that pushes employees to strive for 'excellence', and this belief has led to substantial comment in critical analyses on work and employment (Kaplan, 2003). It is important to extend such work to studies of developing economies and of management roles in 'creative' and 'new(er)' professions such as arts management, online platform development, real estate management and sports management.
The changing nature of work can be further elaborated through investigations of how managers construct their identities and reproduce their current work arrangements. Two approaches, identity work (Beech et al., 2008) and institutional work (Lawrence et al., 2009) can offer new insights into what new arrangements at work mean for managers and how managers are complicit in reproducing new work situations. For example, Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) argue that identity at work is a process of 'becoming' and is connected to the person's position in the organization and their work as a manager. Their empirical example specifically examines how a manager and the work she did was connected to her identity at work. Relatedly, the reproduction of managerial work and the specific micro-practices that managers use to create, maintain and disrupt different work arrangements has also received scant attention and is in need of further development.

In sum, managerial work has changed and is still undergoing a number of significant changes that have not been reflected in the current literature. This special issue is focused on understanding the current state of managerial work and determining new, vibrant sites for further investigation. As such, we hope that papers submitted to the special issue will focus on a variety of research questions, methods and approaches that will help develop our understanding of the ways in which the new pace, environment and social dynamics of managerial work affects the constitution of contemporary work and family life.

Finally, below are a series of questions that researchers might consider, but are not limited to, in developing their papers:

- Have traditional models of organizational governance been altered? And is the context of ownership important here; for example, does a move to neo- or post-bureaucracy imply different management control strategies?
- Who, what and where are the managers? Are corporate elites, for example, increasingly distanced from the work of more junior managers, and if so, are there new classes of managers emerging in corporate systems?
- Does research on emergence of managers from non-traditional settings (e.g. BRIC economies) challenge traditional approaches, or are we witnessing convergence, hybridization or even condensation of traditional management styles? Are there significant institutional differences, for example, in national patterns of managerial work, or are there pressures to converge? Does management in non-traditional or emerging organizational forms challenge conventional theories?
- To what extent are 'new' (or post-bureaucratic) organizational forms representative of contemporary business and management structures, or are they mainly confined to knowledge-based, high technology companies?
- Are there significant differences among managers at different organizational levels in terms of the above issues (senior, middle and junior) and to what extent do these differences intersect with age, gender and racial identifications?
- Has what managers do at work changed? What is the subject of managerial work after the management of processes, outputs and outcomes?
- What is the nature of managerial work within new organizational forms such as social enterprises, micro enterprises and new social movements?

Contributors should note:

- This call is open and competitive, and the submitted papers will be double-blind reviewed by experienced scholars in the field.
- Submitted papers must be based on original material not accepted for publication by, or under consideration for publication with, any other journal or publication outlet.
- For empirical papers based on data sets from which multiple papers have been generated, authors must provide the guest editors with copies of all other papers based on the same data to ensure a unique intellectual contribution is being made.
- The guest editors will select a limited number of papers to be included in the special issue. Other papers submitted to the special issue may be considered for publication in other issues of the journal at the discretion of the Editor-in-Chief.
- To be considered for this Special Issue, submissions must fit with the Aim and Scope of Human Relations as well as the call for papers.
- Papers should also adhere to the submission requirements.
- Papers should be submitted through the online system http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/hr
- Please indicate in your covering letter that your article is intended for this special issue.
Prospective contributors are welcome to consult the guest editors prior to submitting their work:

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References


