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THE RISE OF MANAGERIALISM IN INTERNATIONAL NGOs

Matthew Eagleton-Pierce
SOAS University of London
Email: m.eagleton-pierce@soas.ac.uk

Abstract

Managerialism has become increasingly incorporated into the practices of international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) in recent decades. To date, IPE has largely failed to examine how and why the managerial ethic has weaved itself into the fabric of prominent INGOs that have a stake in the global economy. The limited IPE literature that has addressed such activity has either cast such changes as part of a culture of professionalisation or as an outgrowth of neoliberalism. This article seeks to question these readings by directly dissecting how managerialism operates within a *milieu* which has been historically critical of capitalism. The argument is underpinned by conceptual insights from critical management studies, particularly how managerialism is associated with instrumental rationality and control. In relation to international development policy, the article examines the major macro institutional and ideological factors that have encouraged the spread of managerialism. To deepen our understanding of these trends, the article offers new empirics on the struggle over managerialism within Oxfam GB, from a limited imprint in the 1980s to increasing normalisation from the early 2000s. The article calls for IPE to better unmask the internal politics of INGOs and, in turn, connect such evidence to wider structural tendencies.

Keywords

Managerialism; International Non-Governmental Organisations; Development Policy; Oxfam; Rationality; Neoliberalism

Word count (including abstract, footnotes and references)

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The spread of ideas associated with managerialism has become increasingly incorporated into the practices of international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) in the past three decades.[1] Before the 1990s, major INGOs which had a concern for social and economic justice in the global economy tended to resist managerial knowledge and agendas. Today, similar to leading corporations, governments, and international organisations, many embrace strategic planning, performance monitoring, and stakeholderism, frameworks which carry a macro concern with instrumental rationality and control. But the evolution of managerialism in INGOs has generated an often intense debate around its progressive and regressive consequences. To date, IPE theorists have largely failed to examine how and why managerialism has weaved itself into the fabric of prominent INGOs that have a stake in the international economy. The limited IPE literature that has addressed such activity has either cast such changes as part of an expanding culture of professionalisation within global governance or treated it as an outgrowth of neoliberalism. This article seeks to question these readings by directly analysing how the managerial mindset operates within a *milieu* which has been historically critical of capitalism. In so doing, the argument explains not only macro patterns of ideological diffusion and the pathways through which managerial ideas have entered into large INGOs, but also how such analysis sheds new light on the wider logic of managerialism as a social technology of organisational control.[2]

There now exists a substantive body of IPE scholarship which has explored how non-state, transnational entities have organised and mainstreamed their activities in the world economy. The number of NGOs has risen over the post-Cold War period, with one estimate pointing to an increase from around 3000 in 1990 to more than 8000 by 2010 (Union of International Associations 2010). Arguing that such actors are worthy of serious study, the rapid growth of INGOs during recent decades has been subsequently well documented, particularly in relation to the political economy of international organisations, regimes, and club forums (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Reimann 2006; Willetts 2011; Johnson 2016; Quark 2016). Under the heading of 'global civil society', IPE theorists have both questioned the utility of such a conceptual category and empirically traced how INGOs deploy material and ideational resources to enhance their impact (Amoore and Langley 2004; Germain and Kenny 2005). In turn, these accounts have often been intertwined with normative debates around the potential of INGOs to 'democratise' or legitimise global economic governance (Scholte 2011; Bernstein 2011) or, via a neo-Gramscian perspective, to provide the seeds for counter-hegemonic movements (Cox 1999; Gill 2008).

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[1] Any discussion of non-governmental organisations provokes definitional issues. The category of NGO is often contested and ill-determined. As commonly conceived, NGOs are viewed as being relatively autonomous from the state and business entities, although as I will explain, this aspect can be problematised. In this article, I do not seek to account for all potential groups that could be enveloped under the larger heading of NGO. Rather, my main focus involves a sub-category of international NGOs: established groups that have an interest in the political economy of international development.

[2] The meaning of ideology in this article departs from the frequently perceived reductionist Marxist sense of the 'dominant ideology', that is, a coherent 'system' which can be manipulated by Machiavellian elites. Instead, I prefer to reconsider ideology via a broader culturalist perspective, one that allows space for the everyday production and consumption of ideologies involving multiple actors. See Boltanski and Chiapello (2007); Freeden (1998).

In more recent literature, scholars have analysed INGOs in light of two larger frames of reference: professionalisation and neoliberalisation. In terms of the former, attention has been devoted to how INGOs have cultivated professional authority, particularly through the command of expert knowledge and morality-driven arguments (Stroup and Wong 2017; see also Baillie Smith and Jenkins 2011; Seabrooke and Henriksen 2017). For instance, in relation to trade politics, Kristen Hopewell (2015) has observed how some INGOs who target the World Trade Organization (WTO) nurture a professional ethos of behaviour and discourse which increasingly mirrors the practices of trade officials (also see Eagleton-Pierce 2018). Other analysts have been interested in specific instruments used by INGOs in their policy struggles, such as the role of benchmarks within the politics of quantification (Broome and Quirk 2015; Seabrooke and Wigan 2015). For some authors, these patterns of professionalisation can also be considered part of the so-called neoliberalisation of civil society. This viewpoint has attended to different concerns, but tends to centre around how INGOs adjust their policy positions to compete within a dominant orthodoxy which 'makes sense' to established institutions of power (Cooley and Ron 2002; Kamat 2004; Hannah 2014; Dauvergne and LeBaron 2014; Hopewell 2015).

Within these IPE debates, however, an explicit focus on how large INGOs have encountered managerial theories or behavioural logics has been largely missing or, at best, approached in an oblique fashion. When referenced, managerialism tends to be used only as a descriptive term rather than an empirical object in its own right; that is, a phenomenon with particular practices. Thus, in addition to professionalism and neoliberalism, the notion of managerialism is often presumed to be synonymous with 'marketisation', 'bureaucratisation', or to denote some 'depolitical' process. Even in Dauvergne and LeBaron's (2014: 124-128) book-length study on the 'corporatization of activism', there is relatively little attention paid to 'management culture' in INGOs.[3] In Dietrich's (2016) comparative study of aid effectiveness involving non-state actors, New Public Management (NPM) agendas are noted, yet how such ideas shape the internal make-up of INGOs is not explored. One exception in the wider IR literature is Jutta Joachim and Andrea Schneiker's (2018) research into how humanitarian INGOs act like businesses. They suggest that the appropriation of 'firm-like' attributes in INGOs entails a broader, yet nuanced, shift in 'mind-set' within such groups, one that does not proceed in a uniform manner from the 'corporate model'. Rather, which managerial theories and capacities are learnt, how they are internally tailored and construed, and what material implications are generated are all open questions which cannot be easily assumed in advance.

My argument in this article dovetails with some of the themes developed by Joachim and Schneiker (2018), but it also takes inspiration from how other fields of scholarship have dissected both the nature of managerialism and the particular ways in which managerial practices have become part of the activities

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[3] Nevertheless, the study does feature attention to a number of themes that could be viewed as tied to a managerial vision, including NGO partnerships with major corporations, fair trade consumption, and arguments around the delimiting of radical activism.

of major INGOs. I suggest that conversations in these areas are directly relevant for how IPE can grasp the forms and uneven material effects of managerialism on multiple actors within the world economy. At a theoretical level, this article draws upon insights from critical management studies as a productive literature which, since the 1980s, has explored some of the core ideologies and working methods that encompass managerialism. My argument seeks to probe, in particular, enduring problems around rationality, performance, and control within organisations and how such issues manifest themselves in INGOs (Clegg 1981; Reed 1989; Grey 1996, 2017; Townley 2002, 2008). With reference to the empirical heart of my argument, I also deploy insights found within development studies, specifically the field of 'development management', along with other analysis drawn from voluntary sector studies (Dichter 1989; Thomas 1996, 1999; Dart 2004; Roberts, Jones, and Fröhling 2005; Brinkerhoff 2008; Dar and Cooke 2008; Hvenmark 2016). Here, I seek to understand not only how managerialism has shaped the public agendas issued by INGOs, but also how such changes have been internally understood by those agents who create, enable, adapt, and contest managerial reason.

Hence, this article also contributes to two larger debates in IPE. First, as noted, through exploring major features of managerialism, it enriches the longstanding study of dominant ideas and practices in the world economy. For those who explore either the political economy of professionalism or neoliberalism, the study of managerialism shares some overlaps, such as around the analysis of expertise and the role of business as a laboratory for thinking concerning wider organisational behaviour. However, in keeping with this special issue, I concur with Knafo *et al*. (2019) that managerialism carries its own particular historical legacies and, moreover, should be treated as an adaptable set of social technologies that are appropriated for a range of governing purposes. Second, this article problematises a structuralist tendency in IPE to read major INGOs as players who reflect larger systems of power, notably with respect to the ties of collaboration or coercion with the state (see also Stroup and Wong 2017). As I will explain when discussing the power of managerialism, this perspective is certainly needed for deciphering how INGOs are constrained or enabled through webs of material and ideational relations. But too often INGOs are still depicted as stylised abstractions, with little attention devoted not only to the extraordinary diversity of such groups but also, in particular, to how politics are actually conducted and contested behind the scenes. This article therefore seeks to complement the structuralist perspective with a micro-level tracing of the managerial footprint in a particular INGO, a process that will explain more precisely how and why managerialism has taken hold.

The argument is organised into three main sections. First, through engaging with the literature in critical management studies, I discuss a particular definition of managerialism which will serve to guide and inform the entire argument. Second, I turn to address the empirical context of the political economy of international development and debate why major INGOs have reshaped themselves through managerial logics. Since the 1980s, these reasons pivot around indigenous institutional growth aims, funding conditionality demands from leading donors, along with wider cultural and political trends. Evidence here is largely drawn from major INGOs which have an established UK base or

centre of activity, such as CAFOD, Christian Aid, Save the Children, or the Red Cross. The third and longer section goes inside this field to uncover the workings of managerialism in the particular case of Oxfam GB. Due to Oxfam's size and internal contests over managerial ideas, which have a historical legacy over several decades, I argue that it makes for a valuable object of examination. I first explore how managerial concepts and practices gradually entered the organisation, from embryonic forms in the 1980s and 1990s to mature practices in the early decades of this century. I focus on the development of Oxfam's agenda around monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) as a revealing instance of managerialism in a major INGO. Through applying the insights derived from the conceptual discussion, the aim of this case study is to uncover more precisely how the managerial ethic has been at once legitimised and contested as a form of governance. In turn, I argue in the process how the category of managerialism offers a more precise vehicle for explaining these changes, particularly when compared to the notion of neoliberalism.

1.   CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

As argued in the Introduction to this special issue (Eagleton-Pierce and Knafo), the larger concept of managerialism points to the processes through which management ideas and practices spread across space and time. In this article, drawing upon insights from critical management studies, I anchor the discussion around two larger themes. First, as many scholars have argued, managerialism encompasses models and ideals which carry a Weberian imprint of instrumental rationality (Edwards 1980; Watson 1994). Instrumental rationality emphasises calculation, deliberateness, and predictability in order to formulate the most efficient relationship between means and end (Weber 2013[1922]). Whether this efficiency is actually accomplished is an empirical question, but the ideological consistency of seeking efficiency is a hallmark of the managerial mindset. In practice, managerialism will often experiment with value or substantive rationality; that is, not simply a single goal, but a range of ethical justifications for inspiring commitment (for instance, ecological sustainability) (Weber 2013[1922]). As explored in the case study, instrumental and value rationalities are frequently combined in various ways, although the former arguably has a more dominant weight. Second, the concept of managerialism also implies one of the central preoccupations in management practice: the problem of control (Clegg 1981; Beniger 1989; Chau, Lowe, and Puxty 1989; Reed 1989; Otley, Broadbent, and Berry 1995; Berry *et al*. 2009). We should not assume that the declared aspiration for control, on the part of those who can exercise power, will be effective. Protests, miscalculations, accidents, and mundane ignorance inevitability blur the deceptively straight lines of managerial reason. Such patterns may even be acknowledged by relevant parties, and can be accompanied by skepticism and cynicism, but the need to be *seen to be in control*, at the very least, serves as a powerful underlying motivation for reproducing managerialism (Grey 2002).

These core modalities of managerialism are reproduced via a wide range of theories and practices found in institutional environments. One area of relevance for my enquiry here centres on debates tied to 'performance

management' or 'results-based management'. As a concept associated with rationalised monitoring, performance management emerged in the 1970s, first in relation to the targeted, behavioural intervention of workers in firms, before gradually expanding to embrace larger institutional questions on efficiency, accountability, and 'quality of service'. Performance management is a vague reference, but tends to direct thinking towards organisational objectives, the means for measuring goal attainment, and how such activity relates to wider strategic visions (Townley 1993; Otley 1999; Ferreira and Otley 2009). In an effort to represent and intervene legitimately in such processes, policies of performance management often involve the production of statistical indicators, targets, benchmarks, and audits. The related notion of results-based management (RBM) has echoes of earlier ideas, notably Peter Drucker's (2011[1954]) influential 'management by objectives' model which captured the ear of corporate elites in the 1960s and 1970s. As a contemporary framework, RBM began to be adopted from the 1990s, particularly by governments, international organisations, and charities. As I will explain, similar to performance management, RBM is inherently coloured by the core features of managerialism, notably assumptions and desires for control, along with linear patterns of reasoning and a focus on outcomes.

How can this conceptual framework on managerialism be compared to the larger study of neoliberalism in IPE and related fields? Depending upon how one defines neoliberalism this question invites multiple readings (Eagleton-Pierce 2016). For instance, Hanlon (2018) argues that neoliberal intellectual thought and management theory share comparable features around the pursuit of competition and elite-led leadership. From this perspective, management is 'a central neoliberal tool', one which is opposed to alternative modes of democracy (Hanlon 2018: 300). Other authors, including Linsi (2019) in this special issue, have examined how the related narrative of competitiveness – viewed by many to be a classic feature of neoliberal policy rhetoric – was inspired by Michael Porter's (1990) efforts to develop business-like strategies for entire countries. Closer to my interest in managerialism in the field of development policy, a range of critics have noted how the turn to New Public Management (NPM) from the 1980s can be framed in light of neoliberal trends. While the core of NPM has remained rather ambiguous, it broadly constitutes an amalgamation of ideas drawn from corporate management, institutional economics, and public choice (Pollitt 1993; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011). According to its advocates, governments are assumed to be suffering from a 'performance deficit' (Kamensky 1996: 249) by trying to maintain the quality of public services yet, at the same time, relieve the burden on taxpayers and enhance democratic accountability. Managerial ideas were seen as an inspiration for how efficiency savings could be realised, along with importing models of customer satisfaction and choice. In this sense, therefore, the ideology of managerialism is depicted by some commentators as the 'organisational glue' for holding together wider neoliberal rationalities across different institutional spaces (Clarke and Newman 1997).

At the same time, however, there are risks in conceptually fusing managerialism with neoliberalism. One major distinction concerns how managerialism is a form of governance which does not always require a profit

or market making activity. Some of the primary empirical concerns in the study of neoliberalism, such as the politics of privatisation, financialisation, or trade liberalisation, may be reproduced through certain managerial practices, but this does not exhaust all possible expressions of the managerial ethic. Rather, concurring with Knafo *et al.* (2019), I view managerialism as a set of malleable social technologies which are open-ended with respect to the institutional site and *telos*. In this sense, therefore, I suggest that managerialism cannot always be neatly encapsulated under what is commonly viewed as a neoliberal commodification process. This is not to suggest that dominant diffusional pathways in ideas are not observed, such as from the corporate space to governments and onwards to INGOs. Rather, my aim here is to uncover how managerial practices are, in the deepest sense, concerned with wider struggles over organisational design and the dispositional conduct of individuals. At the same time, the focus on managerialism also sharpens the analytical attention around particular actors that are associated with the reproduction of such knowledge, such as consultancies, business schools, and management theorists. For sure, one could deploy the catch-all frame of neoliberalism to analyze these latter groups, but managerialism is arguably a more precise reference point. Tracing how these groups and other forces have made their mark on the political economy of global development, and the operations of major INGOs in particular, is now the concern of the next section.

2. MANAGERIALISM AND INGOs IN THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Since the mid-1980s, ideas and practices associated with managerialism have become increasingly prominent in large INGOs that have a stake in the political economy of international development. As explained in the introduction, this important trend has largely bypassed IPE scholarship, yet has been explored in adjacent fields. This has resulted in different terms to summarise such tendencies, including the notion of INGOs becoming 'business-like', 'corporatised', 'marketised', or 'hybrid'. In development studies, these debates have clustered around the area of development management (Dichter 1989; Thomas 1996, 1999; Roberts, Jones, and Fröhling 2005; Brinkerhoff 2008; Dar and Cooke 2008; Gulrajani 2010), along with others who have discussed similar themes in voluntary sector studies (Dart 2004; Hvenmark 2016). Not surprisingly, a range of normative claims have surfaced within these debates, from relatively neutral, 'reformist' positions to more 'radical' critiques that argue INGOs which adopt managerialism blunt their mission of social justice in the world economy. As a way to provide the wider empirical context for the subsequent Oxfam case study, I offer here three reasons for why managerialism has become more common in INGOs concerned with international development. These factors revolve around: (1) an aspiration for organisational growth and internal improvement; (2) the influence of ideas and agendas from leading donors; and (3) wider political and societal trends. In practice, all these reasons are interrelated and it can be difficult determining which is more important at any point in time. I plot these historical patterns in relation to major INGOs that have an established UK presence, such as CAFOD, Christian Aid, and the Red Cross.

Considering the first theme, from the mid-1980s, in the wake of the Cambodian and Ethiopian humanitarian crises, many of these INGOs developed a greater public profile and, consequently, a motivation to expand operations and maintain growth. For example, from 1984 to 1986, the combined income of seven of the largest UK-based development INGOs almost doubled to £390 million, before later peaking at nearly £1 billion in 2006 (see Figure 1). As many have noted, this period marked the 'ascent of the big-budget NGO' (Dauvergne and LeBaron 2014: 111). Growth in organisational complexity and rising expectations inevitably prompted debates on how to improve working practices, particularly when there appeared to be a gap between the aspiration surrounding INGO goals and the actual capacity to realise such objectives (Dichter 1989; Thomas 1996, 1999; Wallace 1997). Some critics argued that INGOs needed to prioritise 'nuts-and-bolts' management skills in order to enable more effective development policy impacts, such as basic planning around budgeting and personnel (Dichter 1989: 381). As part of this process, there were related aspirations around how to professionalise fundraising, marketing, and research in ways that would enhance efficiency (Wallace 1997). The turn to professionalisation was accompanied by higher education providers offering related degrees.[4] Although managerial thinking in such entities was still tentative from the late 1980s to the mid-1990s, large INGOs were beginning to experiment with certain ideas, particularly around strategic planning and initiatives under project management (Korten 1990; Smillie 1995; Wallace with Bornstein and Chapman 2007).
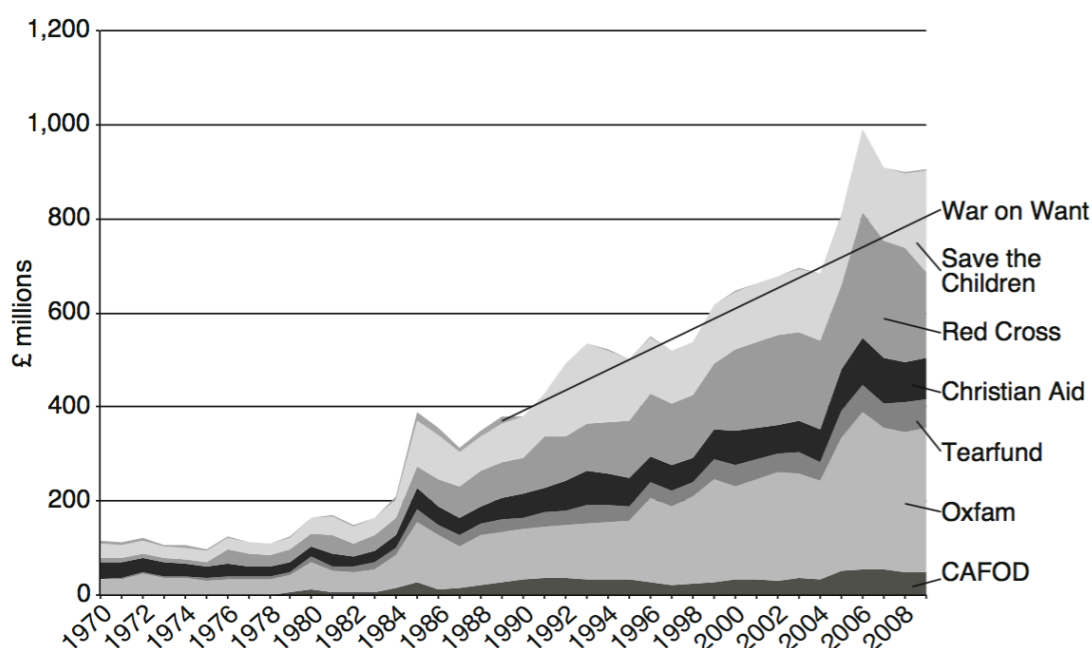
Figure 1: Income of selected international development organisations with UK presence, 1970-2009 (adjusted for inflation, 2009). Derived from annual reports and accounts, organisations concerned; Charity Statistics (various years). Source: Hilton *et al*. (2012): 49.

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[4] In 1995, the London School of Economics established an MSc in NGO Management. In 1996, the Open University followed by launching an MSc in Development Management degree.

This incorporation of managerialism into INGOs cannot be adequately understood without situating such actors in light of the broader history of the development industry. As suggested, since managerialism is embedded in the episteme of rational modernity, it is not surprising to find connecting threads of meaning dating back to the 1950s or even earlier (Escobar 1995; Cooke 2003). For instance, the field of 'development administration', prominent in the early post-WWII decades, drew inspiration from the management theories of Frederick Taylor and Henri Fayol, before later adopting insights from the planning, programming, and budgeting (PPB) approach advocated by the US government (Gant 1979; Krause 2014). In 1969, in a move that would have lasting effects on the mainstreaming of managerialism, the logical framework analysis (LFA or logframe) was created by a management consultancy firm for the US Agency for International Development (USAID). As argued by Jacqueline Best (2014: 169), the logframe should be read as part of the ideational roots of the now dominant 'measuring results' donor agenda, a device which has been widely utilised by multilateral donor agencies and, from the 1990s, INGOs. As a tool of performance management, it initially grew in response to popular and Congressional criticism of alleged misspending in aid projects. Via a 4x4 matrix, the logframe places an emphasis on how agencies should link efforts with outputs, including a need to find 'objectively verifiable indicators' and the 'means of verification' (Krause 2014). Elsewhere, from the mid-1970s, the formation of monitoring and evaluation (M&A) units in the World Bank, the UN, and the OECD emerged in reaction to similar criticism around perceived implementation failures in aid policies and the need for tighter controls. By the early 2000s, M&A was firmly embedded in such institutions, with a focus on both the internal and external functioning of organisations, and often enveloped under the larger category of 'results-based management' (UNDP Evaluation Office 2002; Kusek and Rist 2004).

The normalisation of results-based management in development policymaking also needs to be seen in relation to the aforementioned turn to NPM and the neoliberal reconfiguration of the state. Within these changes, of which the UK was a test case, a major shift involved recasting large INGOs as accommodating and supposedly 'non-ideological' service delivery partners with the state, rather than oppositional social forces (Edwards and Hulme 1996; Stroup 2012; Hilton *et al*. 2013). Compared to government, INGOs were often depicted in these contexts as legitimate implementers of aid projects, with better grassroots knowledge and the ability to embrace participatory forms of engagement (Edwards and Hulme 1996). When such INGOs began to derive a rising share of their income from government sources, these relations became even more entangled.[5] From 1983 to 1994, UK government funds to INGOs increased by almost 400 per cent to around £69 million.[6] With the establishment of the Department for International Development (DFID) in 1997, financing has tended to favour the big players, such as Oxfam, Save the

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[5] For UK-registered development INGOs, other major institutional donor funding sources beyond DFID have included the EU, Comic Relief, and other European governments.
[6] From 1970 to 1997, the Overseas Development Administration (ODA) was the main agency for UK policy on international development, formally located under the Foreign Office.

Children, and Christian Aid (Wallace with Bornstein and Chapman 2007). From 2000 to 2016, this special treatment given to the major INGOs was cemented through a new mechanism, Programme Partnership Agreements (PPAs), a scheme which encouraged long-term, deeper cooperation between DFID and INGOs. From 2011 to 2016, PPAs committed £673 million to fund INGO projects.[7] In return for this funding, INGOs tended to deploy the language of NPM used by DFID, particularly around 'value for money', 'performance indicators', 'delivering goods and services effectively and efficiently', and 'rigorous reporting'. At the same time, the logframe became an essential instrument and no PPA application was complete without it (Wallace with Bornstein and Chapman 2007).

A third theme of significance involves the wider social context in which managerialism appears as a potential solution (or foil) to accountability problems. It is often assumed that accountability is a normatively good value and, thus, the more accountability the better. But INGOs in the development space have long been vulnerable to criticism regarding whom they speak for and how such accountability should be measured and enhanced (Jagadananda and Brown 2010). From the 1990s, as they became larger entities and received more official funding, these criticisms became frequent and at times acute. INGOs are often caught in a pincer movement to respond to multiple accountabilities: 'downwards' to staff, supporters, and potential 'beneficiaries'; and 'upwards' to donors, trustees, auditors, and government authorities (Edwards and Hulme 1996; Jordan and van Tuijl 2006; Lewis 2007). These pressures involved INGOs tending to centralise management, such as with boards and executive teams, along with making appeals to the language of transparency (Dauvergne and LeBaron 2014). Again, this shift needs to be understood in relation to wider trends, notably the 'good governance' agendas emanating from the World Bank and IMF (Soederberg 2001, 2005). In the UK, the particular role of the right-wing media has added a further layer of concern, with such outlets often constructing a narrative of suspicion around INGOs, including disputing the need for aid money or exposing abuse allegations, the latter of which rocked the sector in 2018.[8] When faced with these charges, the abstract managerial reflex tends to be activated. As I have suggested, managerial knowledge is attractive when it appears to show to others a capacity for control, including in this context the ability to plot the chains of delegation which connect responsibility for a particular project with a wider network of relations. Again, the vocabulary and entire presentation of abstract managerialism – a 'disembodied and disembedded' model that can be seemingly applied to all contexts (Townley 2002: 550) – appeals to a modern sensibility.

But once embedded within the culture of an NGO, complete with its own cadre of experts and supporters, I would argue that managerial knowledge is not

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[7] For the data, see DFID, 'Programme Partnership Arrangements (PPAs); Guidance': https://www.gov.uk/guidance/programme-partnership-arrangements-ppas. In 2016, PPAs were terminated.

[8] For instance, among countless stories which could be cited, see Martin, D., 'Charities Including Oxfam Are Accused of Campaigning for Higher Levels of Foreign Aid "For Their Own Benefit"', *Daily Mail*, April 15, 2016.

merely a reaction to these problems, but a contributing cause which further fuels anxiety over accountability deficits. In one sense, this cycle results from a common criticism: managerialism often struggles to shape behaviour in alignment with its promoted blueprint. The 'human element' will inevitably evade, mask, or only partially reveal itself to the gaze of accountability. Among complications, there may be confusion or bias over which 'stakeholders' to privilege; divergences between 'local understandings' in the field and central reporting; and contortions around data collection and analysis, notably with respect to intangible knowledge or simply unknown details (Koppell 2005; Wallace with Bornstein and Chapman 2007; Roche 2015). Such issues are certainly debated within INGOs, but what often emerges is a reformist attitude to complicate existing frameworks – to make 'better' accountability measures and to recast disappointments as 'failing forwards' – rather than holistically decipher how the wider social system, with its internal contradictions, is reproducing particular expectations of comportment. As Roche (2015: 92) argues, development INGOs 'seem to behave as if they can meet more onerous results reporting and value for money demands placed upon them *and* promote transformational development'. Thus, to recall the conceptual discussion, I would argue that managerialism encourages this attitude that organisational manageability is fundamentally possible, desirable, and expandable; the idea of an unmanageable world does not cross its ideological radar.

It could be suggested, therefore, that the incorporation of managerial technologies into the field of global development policy was overdetermined and, certainly by the late 1990s, carried a sense of inevitability. However, as hinted at, within the social world of activism there have always been expressions of dissent. As a way to segue to the case study, some criticisms can be highlighted (Lewis 2008). First, since many individuals who work in INGOs express a normative desire for 'alternative worlds' which are beyond prevailing orthodoxies, managerialism – with its historical ties to capitalist enterprises and the bureaucratic state – can often appear as the antithesis. Others have argued that managerialism should be rejected because it represents an ideology of Western rule, one which has linkages to patterns of (neo)colonial domination (Dar and Cooke 2008; Girei 2016). Second, many development activists share a dispositional identity towards action and socio-economic change. Getting out of the office, into the field, and furthering the cause of justice represents, for many, the *raison d'être* of the activist life. By contrast, the managerial orientation – with its primary propensity to see relations through instrumental rationality and what is efficient rather than what is morally right – is read by some as a conservative and tainted belief system (Chambers 1986, 1993). A third and related criticism concerns the view that money should not be (excessively) spent on administration but, rather, directed towards the poor. This notion is found not only among activists who may doubt the worth of managerialism, but also among thinkers on the political right. In short, these themes help to shed light on how the turn to managerialism in the political economy of development is not only the product of many sources, but has been, and continues to be, contested as a idea and practice.

3.   CASE STUDY: OXFAM AND THE TURN TO MANAGERIALISM

How has managerialism shaped Oxfam and what critiques have been provoked by such processes? In this final section, I return to the core modalities of managerialism, including the perennial concern with rationality and control, in order to better explore this question. The choice of Oxfam was informed by two core reasons. First, it is a powerful actor in the NGO sector and has demonstrated a history of experimentation with managerial ideas and agendas, to the extent that the group has arguably helped to consolidate such practices in relation to other major INGOs in the development space. Second, with the opening of the Oxfam archives, one can now better uncover the internal struggles over managerial notions and forms of behaviour. There are many potential illustrations of managerialism in Oxfam which could be examined, such as partnerships with the private sector or the particular role of senior managers. In the discussion here, however, I have chosen to concentrate on the emergence, and later solidification, of agendas around monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) within Oxfam GB.[9] As an initial definition, MEL is a set of activities concerned with how organisations define, measure, and assess their work, with a view to promoting effectiveness, accountability, and understanding.[10] I argue here that the case of MEL is a pertinent example of how managerial reason has found its way into major INGOs, reshaping expectations and forms of conduct in ways that are both progressive and regressive. Empirical objects which have received the MEL treatment at Oxfam GB have included many areas associated with the global political economy, such as projects on trade policy, gender, and climate change.[11]

The argument first uncovers a period from the late 1980s to the late 1990s which, I suggest, represents a phase of *embryonic managerialism* when such ideas were increasingly debated. The current period, from the early-2000s, can be summarised as *mature managerialism*, involving a more complex institutionalisation and normalisation of MEL within Oxfam GB, as well as the wider NGO field. In charting this history, I showcase the processes through which managerialism acquired legitimacy within a social world which historically ignored such notions. This movement – from internally viewing MEL as something that would be 'nice to do' to 'fundamental' or even 'existential' to Oxfam GB – reveals some of the broader effects of managerialism as a powerful governing ideology. In the spirit of Weber, I also seek to open up a discussion on the tensions between instrumental and value forms of rationality in how MEL has been conceived, along with more substantive critiques of the entire shift to managerial thinking. In keeping with the macro contribution to IPE outlined in the introduction, this account therefore seeks to reveal the internal

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[9] Prior to 1995, a year when Oxfam International was established as an overarching secretariat body, the group was comprised of 12 largely autonomous, nationally-focused affiliates. As of 2019, there are now 19 affiliates. See https://www.oxfam.org/en/our-governance. My focus in this article is on Oxfam GB, although at different points I note relations with Oxfam International.

[10] In Oxfam GB, as well as in other UK INGOs (such as Save the Children), the category of MEL has also been complemented by an extension: MEAL, which stands for monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning. I will refer to MEL in this article because it is the most commonly used concept.

[11] For instance, on these topics and others, see the Effectiveness Reviews conducted by Oxfam GB: https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/our-approach/monitoring-evaluation/effectiveness-reviews.

politics of a particular INGO in order to construct an agential analysis which complements, and enriches, our understanding of the structural explanations discussed in the second section.

This research is founded upon three sets of sources. First, 20 interviews were conducted with representatives from Oxfam GB, both past and present, who have played a role in the development of MEL (including MEL-dedicated professionals, advocacy staff, and senior managers). In addition, outside Oxfam GB, a small number of other consultants and researchers were also interviewed. Second, the Oxfam Archives, housed at the Weston Library at the University of Oxford, were researched for relevant data. This process included retrieving internal communications, reports, and other documents, many of which have yet to be subjected to academic examination. Third, the existing secondary literature, where relevant, was incorporated into the analysis.

Embryonic managerialism

From the late 1980s to the early 1990s, Oxfam GB was confronted with a rapidly changing and often confusing external context, notably in respect to the end of the Cold War but also increased scrutiny by the Conservative government on spending and political activity (Black 1992; Hilton *et al*. 2013). In particular, following the Charity Commission Inquiry in 1991, where Oxfam GB was criticised for being overly political, there was an intense spotlight on the organisation (Burnell 1992). Internally, amidst staff upheaval, there were efforts to improve how the group defined and conducted its activities. During this period, one saw tentative steps, largely guided by a few voices rather than representing any kind of organised initiative from senior figures, to develop agendas around greater monitoring and evaluation.[12] In private communications, the reasons given for such activity are rather abstract, aspirational, and partial, often without reference to the particular agents or issues which may have questioned the legitimacy of Oxfam GB. Reports speak of the need 'to do what we do better'[13], within an environment which features increasing demands for accountability, competition for financing, and the 'pressure to show positive results'.[14] On the basis of cost and efficiency concerns, there was a call for more systematic planning and appraisal across the group, rather than one-off, 'snapshot' evaluation reviews.

By the early 1990s, the appeal to strategic planning was beginning to resonate, particularly at senior management levels. Monitoring and evaluation activity was housed within this larger frame. An important stimulus to these debates was provided by Compass, a consultancy firm hired by Oxfam GB to provide advice on how to restructure the organisation, recommendations which were

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[12] The acronym of MEL was not used during this time and only entered circulation from the late 1990s.

[13] Frances Rubin and Hugh Goyder, 'Proposals for an Oxfam Policy on Monitoring and Evaluation', May 1990, 7 (PRG/8/3/7/9, Oxfam Archive, Weston Library, University of Oxford).

[14] Hugh Goyder, 'Monitoring and Evaulation: Policy and Suggested Practice', November 1987, 1. (PRG/8/3/7/9, Oxfam Archive, Weston Library, University of Oxford).

later endorsed by the Trustees.[15] In a subsequent and revealing internal review of the Compass experience and worldview, there was recognition that change was needed in Oxfam GB:

> 'There is a real and urgent need to improve and increase the monitoring, reporting and evaulation work at all levels in Oxfam. Strategic planning highlights the essential need to draw on past experiences and to have information about impact, successes and failures. Without this staff are writing plans on the basis of individual judgement or opinion, not on a more objective set of data…'[16]

In this document, there was an acknowledgement that Compass was calling for a 'style of management [that] required a major break with past practices', one where 'accountability, learning from experience, and measuring performance are central'.[17] It was anticipated that this would require developing better indicators to 'rigorously' measure impact, the increased use of quantitative methods, along with more systematic efforts to prioritise what Oxfam GB could feasibly accomplish within its resources. These proposals, however, immediately faced criticism. The review speaks of how 'many staff were unhappy with the imposition of these [management] concepts', which were seen as 'potentially in conflict with much past ideology and practice in Oxfam'.[18] Instead, such critics argued that the organisation needed to remain ambitious, reactive, and field-led in its activity, without being burdened by systems of accountability that were deemed to be 'unnecessarily heavy and bureaucratic'.[19] It was also suggested that because socio-economic development was inevitably complex, with often unclear causal pathways, indicator measures might not always be valuable. Above all, the review argued that there was a 'mismatch' between the aspiration for global development and the material contribution that Oxfam can provide, a tension that 'has been a difficult experience for many staff, who have found it impossible to abandon their claims to be working effectively on so many levels and in many different ways' (on similar themes, see Smillie 1995).[20]

Despite these criticisms, as the 1990s advanced, the managerial train continued to make inroads into Oxfam GB. In the second half of the decade, following the establishment of Oxfam International and the formalisation of a Strategic Plan (covering 1996 to 2000), discussion of MEL-related activities picked up steam, involving further reports, meetings, and workshops on the subject.[21] By 1998, Oxfam International had moved to create 'Program

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[15] Now rebranded as Compass Partnership, the group continues to specialise in management consultancy services to voluntary and nonprofit organisations.

[16] Tina Wallace and Tony Burdon, 'Strategic Planning Review', Planning and Evaluation Unit, June 1993, 75. (PRG/8/3/7/12, Oxfam Archive, Weston Library, University of Oxford).

[17] Ibid., 10.

[18] Ibid., 13, 17.

[19] Ibid., 13.

[20] Ibid., 70.

[21] For example, see Chris Roche, 'Institutional Learning in Oxfam; Some Thoughts', October 18, 1995. (PRG/8/3/7/10, Oxfam Archive, Weston Library, University of Oxford). Also see Oxfam-UK/Ireland, 'Programme Officers' Workshop', February 25-March 2, 1996, Bali,

Management Standards', a framework which proposed guidelines for how all affiliates could conduct their MEL work.[22] More generally, we also see increased use of external consultants, along with the circulation of reading materials that, in part, drew upon management theory as a source of inspiration.[23] Chris Roche, who led such debates at the time, argued: 'In the late 1990s, there was a feeling that if Oxfam was going to remain relevant, it had to engage with these debates on learning. There was increasing pressure to communicate what the group was actually achieving'.[24] At the same time, the logframe approach, highlighted earlier as a classic performance management device in the tradition of rational linear planning, was becoming embedded in Oxfam GB's projects, notably to satisfy 'upward accountability' demands to DFID. Although criticism of the logframe was pronounced in activist circles, the justification for it often proceeded through references to its presumed 'technical' and 'objective' quality (Gasper 2000). As one former Oxfam staffer expressed it, 'I remember my bosses saying that the logframe was "just a management tool". Don't worry about it, they would say. But I was saying: no, it carries implications and reshapes the way you think about this world. You can't think holistically in these fragmented boxes.'[25] (also see Wallace 1997).

How can we summarise this phase of embryonic managerialism in Oxfam GB and which factors proved most important for encouraging the early development of MEL? At one level, it is important to appreciate how the early thinking around MEL was motivated by a genuine concern to improve operations and not simply a reflection of following the dictates of higher powers or, more insidiously, being 'hoodwinked' by managerial ideas. Lack of clarity on goals, knowledge deficiencies, and problems learning from past projects were serious worries for many Oxfam GB staff. Even the logframe had its supporters who noted its potential for sharpening the purpose of an intervention. This internal dialogue, centred around the desire for professionalised effectiveness, was probably the key catalyst for why MEL was programmatically constructed. To further such ends, I note the particular significance of private consultants who, as seen in other public and private organisations, planted and stimulated managerial thinking within the group. Such activity was important for catching the ear of senior executives who had the authority to reshape the internal organisation of Oxfam GB and, in turn, eventually grant MEL a more secure institutional status. Other channels of external pressure, such as from the UK government, were less important at this time although, by the late 1990s with

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Indonesia, Report on Process and Outcomes. (PRG/8/3/7/10, Oxfam Archive, Weston Library, University of Oxford).

[22] Oxfam International, 'Program Management Standards', Final Report, November 24, 1998. (PRG/8/3/7/10, Oxfam Archive, Weston Library, University of Oxford).

[23] For instance, see in particular 'Preparation for the Proposed Strategic Management Project' (1997). (PRG/8/3/7/19, Oxfam Archive, Weston Library, University of Oxford). This document lists consultants who have provided, or could assist, Oxfam GB on strategic management. Also included are reading lists featuring management theory authors (such as Charles Handy, Tom Peters, and Gareth Morgan); literature applying management ideas to the public sector (such as David Osborne and Ted Gaebler); as well as highlights from the emerging field of development management (such as Alan Fowler). It is admittedly unclear to know how these readings were consulted.

[24] Chris Roche, Former Programme Development Team Leader, Oxfam GB (1994-2002), online interview with author, October 4, 2017.

[25] Tina Wallace, Former Advisor to Oxfam, interview with author, Oxford, October 17, 2017.

the founding of DFID, managerial practices linked to funding were becoming increasingly common and would assume greater significance.

In his discussion of managerialism as a particular form of ideology and organisational conduct, Martin Parker (2002) has argued that one can be pro-organisation, in a core sense of wanting to classify social existence and shape its institutional forms, at the same time as being anti-managerial (also see Grey 2017). Yet the difficulty of observing (or forecasting) this distinction lies in knowing when 'mere organisational improvement' segues into 'excessive managerialism', the latter of which could feature negative social implications. This leads to a deeper behavioural pattern for why MEL tended to diffuse – one which reprises a core theme of my overall argument – around the 'optimistic' allure of managerial vocabulary in a seemingly unmanageable world. Here, we see how managerialism dovetails with the larger ideological content of liberalism when it appeals to the potential improvability of institutions and, in turn, how 'advancing progress' can help to inspire commitment. As documented elsewhere in this special issue, by gesturing to seemingly incontestable objectives such as organisational improvement, and promoting simplified models as a way to address common problems, managerialism has a tendency to creep into a wide variety of institutional spaces (including domains that may be initially hostile to such ideas). The embryonic managerialism of MEL in Oxfam GB did not need to convince all agents within the group but, when such agendas had established a foothold, it made it easier to intensify managerial practices, the recent history of which we can now turn.

Mature managerialism

To recall the wider context discussed in the previous section, from the early 2000s, the major international organisations and OECD governments were strongly promoting the desirability of results-based management for all actors in the development system (OECD 2000; Kusek and Rist 2004; Valters and Whitty 2017). As part of the first DFID PPA Agreement with Oxfam (2001-05), which was subsequently renewed until 2016, investment in MEL systems was encouraged (Oxfam 2006).[26] Partly in response to this pressure, but also reflecting the aforementioned internal motivations, we witness a gradual normalisation of MEL-related work in Oxfam GB. In the context of a Strategic Plan for Oxfam International (2001-06), and upon the direction of the Executive Board, a newly designed MEL team was created.[27] By this stage, MEL was defined as a 'key function of management'. Among various activities, a workshop was held where McKinsey & Company was invited to discuss

[26] From DFID's perspective, strong MEL policies in Oxfam GB were needed to assess the value of PPA grants in relation to DFID's own universe of stakeholders (HM Treasury, Prime Minister's Office etc.). In this regard, the logframe remained the principal tool for monitoring performance, along with annual self-assessment reviews, independent performance reviews (led by external experts), and mid-term and end-of-project reviews.

[27] Oxfam International, 'Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning in a Confederative Context; Preliminary Action Plan for the MEL Team', January 24, 2001. (PRG/8/3/7/9, Oxfam Archive, Weston Library, University of Oxford). At this point, the other affiliates involved with Oxfam GB were Oxfam America, Oxfam Australia, Oxfam Intermón (Spain), and Oxfam Novib (Netherlands), along with five other Oxfam International staff.

success stories of MEL processes from the corporate world.[28] By 2002, a more ambitious MEL framework was proposed.[29] Among major aims, it speaks of the need to 'minimise transaction costs', and cultivate the 'right incentives and culture for organisational learning based on competencies and performance management'.[30] There is a particular concern with trying to marry the interests of donors, who adopt what is labeled an 'input-output-impact chain' method, with 'contextual' evidence that is closer to the lived experiences of the poor.[31] The new framework calls for avoiding an overly bureaucratic approach and to place as much emphasis on 'learning by doing' as on planning.

From 2006, Oxfam GB and Oxfam International markedly increased activity around the subject of accountability. This included committing to international standards with other major INGOs, such as the Global Reporting Initiative and the International Non-Governmental Organisations Accountability Charter, creating in the process a voluntary, peer-based, mutual surveillance mechanism (Crack 2018a).[32] In 2007, Oxfam GB began publishing an annual Accountability Review which, by 2015, was superseded by a single Oxfam-wide Accountability Report. As explained in the broader sector, Oxfam GB has faced reoccurring problems not only in trying to adequately respond to 'multiple accountabilities', but in a manner which demonstrates 'rigorous' evaluation. In 2011, led by an expanding MEL unit, Oxfam GB launched a Global Performance Framework (GPF) in an effort both to assess whether interventions were making a meaningful difference (the learning aspect), and to summarise data across the group into communicable forms for different audiences (the accountability aspect). The GPF features two elements: Effectiveness Reviews, which target particular projects (by the end of 2017, over 100 had been conducted), and a Global Output Report which tries to aggregate the entire impact of Oxfam GB's work, primarily for reporting requirements with senior management and donors (Hutchings 2014). Among notable features of this effort to make MEL part of everyday conduct, one can highlight how it sparked debate on what constitutes rigour and evidence, how to assess causality, and the particular role of quantitative methods. As the current Head of Programme Quality has expressed it, 'The accountability culture isn't going away. Oxfam GB purposefully overswung in the direction of

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[28] McKinsey & Company, 'Monitoring and Evaluation in a Global Confederation; MELT Workshop – Corporate Case Studies', May 29, 2001. (PRG/8/3/7/9, Oxfam Archive, Weston Library, University of Oxford). In addition, one can also note how, from 2005, Accenture established a partnership with Oxfam GB to provide advisory services on various projects. See: https://www.accenture.com/_acnmedia/PDF-25/Accenture-Oxfam-Credential.pdf

[29] Oxfam GB 'Framework for Monitoring, Evaluation and Knowledge Management', April 2002. (PRG/8/3/7/9, Oxfam Archive, Weston Library, University of Oxford).

[30] Ibid., 4.

[31] Ibid., 4.

[32] For the archive of relevant reports, see: https://www.oxfam.org.uk/what-we-do/about-us/plans-reports-and-policies/plans-reports-and-policies-archive. In 2016, the INGO Accountability Charter changed its name to Accountable Now. See: https://accountablenow.org/. Within the Charter, there is a section on 'Professional Management'. On Oxfam's relations through Accountable Now, see: https://accountablenow.org/accountability-in-practice/accountability-reports/oxfam-international/. These types of arrangement have also been referred to as 'accountability clubs', defined as voluntary, rule-based governance systems created and sponsored by NGO actors. See Gugerty and Prakash (2010).

more quantitative evaluation, partly to show that NGOs could "do numbers" and it makes for easier dialogue with donors, but also because it genuinely helps to improve qualitative understanding in our work'.[33]

I would suggest here that an advanced form of managerialism has now stamped its mark upon how MEL has been conceived and conducted within Oxfam GB. Again, however, this has not entailed a uniform acceptance of some unchanging, rational, managerial vision. The critique of managerialism is long-standing within the political economy of development. This pattern continues today within conversations among INGOs and researchers who have problematised and, in cases, strongly rebuked, results-based management frameworks (Roche and Kelly 2012; Eyben *et al.* 2015; Shutt 2016).[34] Many of these ideas coalesce under the new heading of 'adaptive management', an orientation which involves acknowledging the inherent problem of uncertainty and complexity in the practice of development by going beyond 'linear, mechanistic' thinking and focusing on 'course-corrections' within policymaking (Bond 2016: 3; also see Desai *et al.* 2018). In MEL-related dialogues, the adaptive management approach tends to feature references to 'adaptable logframes' and 'theories of change'; how 'power matters'; the need for 'greater reflexivity'; and not to confuse 'vanity metrics' with 'real social change'.[35] It is noteworthy that Oxfam GB has been participating in such debates and, moreover, that some critical voices within DFID, but also elsewhere (such as USAID), have also responded sympathetically to the messier reality that adaptive management claims to capture (Green 2016, 2018; Bond 2016). Indeed, it now appears that adaptive management is not simply a 'passing fad', but has a potentially longer life in the policy world (Green 2019).

Two points can help to shed additional light on this case. First, to draw upon Weber (2013[1922]), I would suggest that MEL-related activity in Oxfam GB reveals an ongoing tension between instrumental and value forms of rationality. Reflective of a bureaucratic mentality, which reveals its lineage with the state and the corporation, the tendency of MEL systems is to gravitate towards the formal, calculating, means-end rationality. In promoting such practices, MEL is essentially preoccupied with surveillance and how to regularise organisational behaviour and, via this dynamic, I would argue that the instrumental form of rationality remains the strongest influence. But the appeal to the ethical or substantive dimension of rationality is often needed to justify or, at the very least, encourage tolerance for such activity, as seen in the increasing intellectual appeal to 'complexity' and 'non-linearity', or explaining more precisely how MEL produces tangible benefits for marginalised populations. Together, it could be argued that the instrumental and value modes of

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[33] Claire Hutchings, Head of Programme Quality, Oxfam GB, interview with author, Oxford, August 30, 2017.

[34] Three notable networks of activity are: (1) 'The Big Push Forward', which developed from 2010, led by Rosalind Eyben and Irene Guijt, among others; (2) 'Thinking and Working Politically', which emerged from 2011, involving donor officials and leading practitioners; and (3) 'Doing Development Differently', an initiative that was formed in 2014, organised by the Overseas Development Institute, among others.

[35] Lindsay McColl, Performance Effectiveness Manager, Oxfam GB, Glasgow; and Marie-Lisa Burrough, Monitoring and Evaluation Adviser for Campaigns, Oxfam GB, Oxford, online interview with author, September 1, 2017.

managerial rationality represent a 'double bind' for Oxfam GB practitioners who are caught trying to reconcile the multiple interests and historical discourses associated with each form (Mitchell 2016). Nonetheless, the adaptive management turn can be read as a way in which certain activists have tried to craft a conversation which deepens the exploration of messy politics. It remains to be seen if such work will lead to a form of managerial rationality in INGOs which is more distinctive from the managerial technologies emanating from governments and IOs within the development industry.

Second, and in keeping with my larger argument, this potential reconciliation process is, in turn, symptomatic of a need to be seen to be in control. Elaborate performance systems and the demand for 'quick deliverables' point to an anxiety about uncertainty and blame avoidance, yet a reluctance to critically explore the unpredictability and unknowability of power (Power 2004; Hood 2010). As critics have noted following the sexual abuse scandal at Oxfam from 2018, INGOs are increasingly encouraged to present to donors and other audiences an 'impossibly immaculate account of success', one which suppresses internal disputes, knowledge gaps, and injustices in their midst (Crack 2018b). To fill this sense of lack and uncertainty, managerialism enters as a deceptively 'hopeful' solution to the problem of control and precision, complete with readymade military and industrial metaphors which are housed within a system of historical meanings. Yet users frequently expect too much from managerialism and, therefore, it is no surprise that when disappointments and setbacks strike, new revisions to the managerial calculus ensue. Understanding why and how managerialism has become normalised in the social space of international development thus requires not only inspecting relevant institutional histories, but also the major cultural meanings within the idea of managerialism itself.

CONCLUSION

Within IPE, a substantial body of literature has coalesced around understanding the activities of non-state actors in the world economy. To conceptually categorise and empirically probe the behaviour of such players, IPE scholars have tended to make use of professionalisation and neoliberalisation as explanatory anchors. While offering some informative insights into the behaviour of such agents, these contributions have neglected how powerful ideas and practices tied to managerialism now serve as a significant source of motivational stimuli for large INGOs. This article has responded to this lacuna by making three main contributions. First, the argument has sought inspiration from the productive field of critical management studies in order to furnish an examination of managerialism which foregrounds the enduring problems of rationality and control in organisations. My argument has explored why the justification for abstract managerialism radiates an attractive aura for many and yet, at the same time, the concrete governance of managerialism is often beset with criticisms, tensions, and contradictions. At a normative level, the article has not claimed that seeking an efficient organisation is, in a basic sense, somehow inherently suspicious, but my argument has critiqued how managerialism, as a particular form of organising, contains potentially regressive properties,

particularly around the overemphasis on instrumental rationality at the expense of other forms of human expression.

Second, via an application to the field of global development policy, I have plotted the key macro explanations for why managerialism, as a set of social technologies, has become intertwined into the conduct of major INGOs. Mapping this multicausal process helps to reveal how managerial ideology has a degree of suppleness, notably with respect to incorporating into its purview those interests who have historically resisted the managerial vision. Through new primary data, the case study on Oxfam GB has uncovered how MEL agendas, imprinted with the managerial stamp, moved from being a marginal activity to a central preoccupation of the group. In one sense, this empirical story shows a process of major INGOs 'catching up' with managerial trends that have advanced within other corporate and political domains. But it also sheds light on the peculiarities of this encounter and the individuals who have struggled to make sense of the merging (or clashing) of the world of advocacy with the world of management. My argument is that one can use the Oxfam case as a comparison with similar trends in other large INGOs, such as Greenpeace, CARE, or Amnesty International. Thus, the generalisability from this case is most suitable in relation to those internationally active players that have ties with multiple funders and other stakeholders. The extent to which MEL agendas have penetrated into small or medium-sized NGOs is, however, an open question which would require further investigation.

In keeping with the aims set out in the Introduction to this special issue, if this case was only explained through the prism of the neoliberalisation of civil society, one would miss salient features of the managerial ethic. I argue that once managerialism is embedded within an institutional culture and the dispositional conduct of certain individuals, it offers a malleable set of social technologies for control. This desire for control – which is often illusory and fleeting as much as substantive and enduring – may be directed towards commodification (*a la* the neoliberal spirit), but in the case of Oxfam reflects a more pervasive anxiety about institutional comportment and how to appear to others as a 'modern' organisation. In this sense, when managerialism becomes part of the mainstream grammar and is made organisationally durable over time (particularly via financial needs), it becomes difficult to dislodge. This is not to disregard how, for instance, adaptive management has drawn more complicated intellectual pictures, yet I argue that these debates are still epistemologically housed within the managerial vision. Dovetailing with other contributions to this special issue (Seabrooke and Sending, Soederberg and Sharma), I also suggest that the focus on managerialism helps to sharpen our spotlight on agents who can pass underexamined in discussions on the world economy, such as consultants, senior managers, or compliance staff – all key players doing the labour of 'selling' managerialism.

The third and wider contribution represents a call for IPE to complement its structuralist analysis of INGOs within the world economy with more contextual, agential, behind-the-scenes case studies. Undoubtedly, INGOs like Oxfam GB are constrained when they mimic dominant organisational design. By seeking to retain an international policy relevant status, such players had limited scope

to seriously deviate from managerial trends which were simultaneously becoming entrenched in other powerful institutions. But external structuring as a source of change within INGOs does not account for the entire story. Indeed, the meaning of 'agency' in relation to INGOs and managerialism provokes a range of reactions and experiences. I have suggested, for instance, that MEL was read by some as a liberating development when compared to orthodox internal cultures that were judged to be inadequate. In light of the recent Oxfam sexual misconduct scandal, we saw again how principles tied to MEL activity, notably transparency, were reactivated and forcefully promoted as the organisation struggled to handle the crisis.[36] This is to suggest, therefore, that managerialism can be strategically appropriated by INGOs to serve objectives that carry a wider socio-political purpose. Yet it still remains difficult to perceive the tipping points when a normatively desirable organisational enhancement segues, often via incremental and deceptively apolitical reforms, into the characteristics of excessive managerialism.

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[36] On the fallout from the case, see Oxfam GB, 'Tackling Abuse: Information and Updates', https://www.oxfam.org.uk/what-we-do/about-us/stamping-out-abuse

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