

Corporate Elites and Leaders in Neoliberal Organizations and Societies

(Doctoral course, 7,5 ECTS credits)

Professor Mikael Holmqvist

Course Description

This course addresses the masters of today's neoliberal society – the corporate elites and leaders. Much has been written and taught about managers in corporations and organizations, focusing on their daily work, decision-making and problems and challenges. But few have focused on the elite groups of corporate actors – the persons that are in control of the supreme command positions, the super-rich and the very wealthy, and the ones that possess extraordinary cultural and symbolic capital that make them powerful figures in societies at large. Today's society is largely controlled by these groups, discursively as well as practically. In order to understand how contemporary organizations and societies function, we need to address the work ethic, worldview and lifestyle of the corporate elites.

In this course, the corporate elites and leaders will be analyzed from the following perspectives:

- (a) their ideology and worldview as expressed through their work ethic;
- (b) their lifestyle and style of life as expressed through the way they lead their lives and form families;
- (c) their education strategies and collective socialization through business school studies;
- (d) gender aspects of corporate elites and leaders through the way they construct social differences between men and women; and
- (e) their relation to society at large through the way they relate to such aspects as taxes, common obligations and duties, and welfare for all.

The course consists of reading selected chapters of a number of relevant books in the social sciences that have recently addressed these issues, and analyzing the books both in writing and through discussions.

Course goal

Having completed the course students should be able to think critically and

comprehensively about the character and role of corporate elites and leaders in contemporary organizations and societies and be able to use different theoretical ideas that appear in the selected texts.

Learning outcomes

On successful completion of the course students should be able to demonstrate a solid command of central theoretical ideas, concepts, mechanisms and critical issues of corporate elites and leaders in organizations and societies. More specifically, students should be able to:

- Demonstrate an understanding of different sources of power and control related to the way modern organizations and societies are managed;
- Clearly and critically discuss and contrast central theoretical constructs in the relevant literature;
- Analyze contemporary organizations and societies from a corporate elite perspective.
- Reflect upon and evaluate the social significance of corporate elites and leaders in modern societies.

Teaching and Learning Methods

The course consists of six seminars.

Assessment

The course is assessed through active participation in compulsory seminars and written assignments for each seminar. The course is concluded by a final written assignment where students should analyze the literature in light of their individual projects.

Absence

Participation at seminars is part of the examination and is therefore compulsory. Absence from the seminars is granted if you have strong personal reasons or if you are ill.

Grades

The following grades are applicable: *pass* or *fail*.

Pass: You have a solid command of the main ideas in the literature and you are able to critically analyze them in a satisfactory manner. You are good at applying these ideas when analyzing real phenomena.

Fail: Your understanding of the main ideas is based on a number of flaws and errors. The work is not of passable standard with serious gaps in the understanding of course material. Overall lack of demonstration of satisfactory understanding of the course material.

Literature

See below

Detailed Syllabus

Seminar 1: Course Introduction

Information on the course and an introductory lecture on the literature of the course. We will go through the literature, focusing on what chapters to read for each book.

Seminar 2: The World of Corporate Managers: Their Ideologies and Ideals

Jackall, R. (1988), *Moral Mazes. The World of Corporate Managers*. New York: Oxford University Press. (Selected chapters; more information at Seminar 1).

Assignment: Read the selected chapters and prepare a written memo (2 pages), which you send to the course teacher one day in advance. Actively participate in the discussion at the seminar.

Seminar 3: Leader Communities: Corporate Elites' Lifestyle

Holmqvist, M. (2017), *Leader Communities: The Consecration of Elites in Djursholm*. New York: Columbia University Press. (Selected chapters; more information at Seminar 1).

Assignment: Read the selected chapters and prepare a written memo (2 pages), which you send to the course teacher one day in advance. Actively participate in the discussion at the seminar.

Seminar 4: Educating Future Leaders: Elite Business Schools

Holmqvist, M. (2022), *Elite Business Schools. Education and Consecration in Neoliberal*

Society. New York: Routledge. (Selected chapters; more information at Seminar 1).

Assignment: Read the selected chapters and prepare a written memo (2 pages), which you send to the course teacher one day in advance. Actively participate in the discussion at the seminar.

Seminar 5: Women and Corporate Leaders

Roth, L. M. (2006), *Selling Women Short. Gender and Money on Wall Street*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. (Selected chapters; more information at Seminar 1).

Assignment: Read the selected chapters and prepare a written memo (2 pages), which you send to the course teacher one day in advance. Actively participate in the discussion at the seminar.

Seminar 6: Corporate Leaders and Societies

Harrington, B. (2016), *Capital Without Borders: Wealth Managers and The One Percent*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. (Selected chapters; more information at Seminar 1).

Assignment: Read the selected chapters and prepare a written memo (2 pages), which you send to the course teacher one day in advance. Actively participate in the discussion at the seminar.

Final assignment

No later than two weeks' after the last seminar, hand in a written analysis of your thesis project based on the literature of the course. This report should cover vital issues and problems as highlighted in the literature and during the seminars. It should not be a summary, but a reflection and analysis, applied to your thesis. 4-6 pages.

Teacher

Mikael Holmqvist is Professor of Business Administration and Associate Professor of Sociology. More information can be found here:

<https://www.su.se/english/profiles/holmq>