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## THE PARADOX OF THE LIBERATED COMPANY: A SUCCESSFUL BUT UNATTRACTIVE MODEL!

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**Abstract.** *This article explores the question of why the liberated enterprise model, despite its apparent superiority, has not become the standard model, outperforming the traditional hierarchical management structure. We will be going by analyzing a series of approaches that fail to explain why this model has not been widely adopted. Meanwhile, contemporary institutionalism analysis suggests the key factor in the slow spread of this model. We have compared the theses of two institutionalism approaches to the three phases of evolution of the liberated enterprise model, which include the first two phases of slow evolution and the current phase of accelerated diffusion. The institutional environment appears to be the decisive factor influencing the expansion of this model. Our aim is to demonstrate the relevance of institutionalism approaches to the problem of disseminating new management methods.*

**Keywords:** *isomorphism, diffusion, institutionalism, liberated enterprise, technological change.*

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### Introduction

The evolution of management is a succession of models, organizational innovations to meet the demands of new industries and ever-increasing uncertainty. Despite the apparent variety of models, their foundation remains fundamentally unchanged: It is fundamentally hierarchical and bureaucratic (Laloux, 2017). It is legitimate to wonder about the persistence of the classic organization for so long, despite the limitations and criticisms it still faces. In the meantime, calls for the abandonment of this model, deemed obsolete, have not ceased to spring up, paired with proposals for more effective alternatives. We focus on the model of the “liberated company”, a philosophy at the antipodes of the classic organization, whose successes and stakeholder satisfaction are widely praised. This has attracted our interest to better understand the non-diffusion of this organizational innovation.

Getz (2017) identifies three phases in the spread of this model. The first phase began with the pioneers of the 1950s and continued until 2000. Then the second-generation phase, which runs until 2012, is gaining momentum, but the rate of diffusion remains slow. The third phase continues today, with an unprecedented popularity for the liberated enterprise. The same observation is confirmed by How Report's 2016 survey of 16,000 executives in 17 countries. Despite a low proportion of 8% of the companies' sample declaring themselves liberated, this figure is clearly rising, compared to 3% in 2012. This acceleration is an interesting phenomenon for us, as we will

be looking to identify the factors driving the new pace of adoption of the new model. To do this, we draw on autobiographical publications by entrepreneurs, including Zobrist (2020) and Gérard (2017), as well as testimonials collected by Getz (2016) and Laloux (2017). Qualitative data on company experiences is used to understand the process of company change and capture variations in their institutional environment.

To grasp the phenomenon of the liberated enterprise and, above all, to understand why it has not become a reference model, we have mobilized a series of approaches. We begin with two explanations that see the new models as a fad. We then move on to Casalegno's (2017) approach, which analyzes the phenomenon from a novelistic point of view with a psychic dimension. To situate the corporate model from a historical perspective, we refer to the work of Bodrožić and Adler (2018). We conclude our theoretical framework with two institutionalism approaches: Meyer and Rowan (1977), followed by the theory of Dimaggio and Powell (1983). In what follows, we will start by defining and characterizing the liberated enterprise model.

## Literature Review

### *1. Genealogy and significance of the liberated enterprise*

The liberated enterprise has a genealogy that can go back beyond Taylorism, and more precisely to the early 19th century in Robert Owen's factories. Landier (2015) described the notion as a "false new idea". The kinship with McGregor is unequivocally established, with a divergence on the types of needs man wants to satisfy. Since then, efforts to build an alternative management strategy to Taylorism have persisted, most notably with the elimination of assembly lines (Thuderoz, 2006) and semi-autonomous teams (Campion et al., 1993). Endenburg proposed the concept of sociocracy in the 1970s, whereas Fauvet's self-organization approach emerged in the 1980s. The concept of freedom was not explicitly established until 1992, when Peters published his book "Liberation Management: Necessary Disorganization for the Nanosecond Nineties". While decisive field trials on the liberated enterprise were progressing slowly, Getz capitalized on this organizational innovation in his book "Liberty and Cie" (2012), which he co-authored with Carney.

According to a 2016 FNEGE survey of 1,557 organizations, Getz is the fourth most influential author among French managers, in addition to being the leading proponent of this new ideology. What is it all about? In fact, it is "an organizational form in which employees enjoy total freedom and have the responsibility to undertake actions that they, not their boss, consider best" (Getz, 2016). In the liberated enterprise, the manager's primary responsibility will be to eliminate the characteristics of the traditional hierarchical organization and create a work atmosphere favorable to freedom of action, based on intrinsic equality between individuals and self-motivation.

A liberated company fosters an empowering environment, giving the collective the power to act. This power exists at the intersection of the ability to act and the means related to work settings. According to Le Boterf (2011), workers must be able to exercise their autonomy, their "knowing how to act" and "willingness to act" in an environment that allows them to "be able to act". Employees are de facto in charge of arranging or regulating in less prescribed professional settings (Rousseau and Ruffier, 2017).

As the movement grows, liberated companies take on more diversified forms, and an increasing number of researchers are interested in them (Jacquinot and Pellissier-Tanon, 2015). However, certain constant characteristics can be summarized as follows:

- The company is de-hierarchical, with few levels;

- Workers work in teams and are free to do whatever is profitable for their company;

- The company prioritize intrinsic equality and eliminates symbols of power;

- An empowering environment fosters agentivity and collective intelligence;

- HRM and financial control functions are delegated to teams;

The company's top management becomes the custodian and guarantor of this autonomy, ensuring that it is maintained.

Thus, this is a profound alteration rather than merely a change in form. The business switches from having two distinct regulatory systems autonomy and control to just one autonomous

one (Reynaud, 1988). Managers abstain from making operational choices, and control regulation is essentially nonexistent. However, they maintain the strategic element, and internal culture absorbed by employees whose behavior is characterized by the organization's values replaces control regulations (Gérard, 2017).

In the power game (Crozier and Friedberg, 1977), antagonistic players forego methods aimed at weakening the opponent and boosting their own camp in favor of cooperative games. This extreme transition exemplifies the complexities of change, which necessitates the cooperation of all stakeholders. Before moving on to historical analysis and institutionalism methods, we will first look at two fashion-related reasons. We will then present a summary of Casalegno's (2017) eclectic interpretation.

## ***2. Explanations in terms of style***

Changes in management models have been interpreted as fashion phenomena, notably by Abrahamson (1996) and Midler (1986). This phenomenon follows a three-stage process: invention, explosion and decline or standardization. Companies have become infatuated with current trends, regardless the efficiency gains they can bring.

In his analysis of fashion, Barthe (1967) describes three instances in the vocabulary of fashion:

A discourse on the industrial world in general (crisis, Japanese success, etc.).

A theoretical and global discourse on the company (What is its core identity? What are the key success factors?, etc.)

A description of a practical management system (definition of procedure, etc.).

The three moments represent a process of inclusive sensemaking (Weick, 1995), in which the company's identity is redefined within a broad and then constrained framework. The new management system must be integrated into the company's new project. The liberated enterprise is a project to re-establish the organization at a critical juncture, typically a time of crisis. "The rhetoric is only complete when all the boxes are filled in, enabling relationships to be established between the state of the world, corporate identity and practical dispositive (the management method is the "application" of a global corporate theory which is itself "adapted" to the characteristics of the present society)" (Midler, 1986, p.77).

Abrahamson's major contribution to fashion is his underlying rationalism and progressivism. The rational reasons focus on performance advantages, whereas the progressive dimension refers to the vision of a responsible man, as represented in slogans like "man is good", "permanent progress", or "elite for all" (Abrahamson 1996, p. 261).

Rationality refers to performance in its various components, which organizational innovation is intended to achieve. As for the progressive logic inherent in the liberated enterprise, it places man in a fundamentally different posture than McGregor's "Y" model: man is not only autonomous and accountable, but he is also good by nature.

Abrahamson's argument emphasizes the progressive thinking of corporate leaders. It is considered that the failure to accept the new shape can be attributed to management's lack of progressive mindset. The second reason for the non-adopting of the new trend, is that the performance it provides, does not encourage the adoption of the form.

A counter-argument is that rational logic has never been used to motivate change (Dimaggio and Powell, 1983; Meyer and Rowan, 1977). The world's 500 largest companies embraced quality circles, with 80% abandoning the solution the next year Casalegno (2017). This points to a mimetic logic in the implementation of new management solutions.

Nonetheless, Midler (1986) identified a significant mutation that appears to be important to us, which relates to the operational mode of consulting businesses. They have moved from a clinical approach, by definition personalized, to a ready-to-wear strategy, offering standard products.

The result is the standardization of tools and models, an exhaustive and standardized package for organizational transformation that is incompatible with the support required to liberate the company, which requires a personalized approach for each individual case. Failure to convert

the liberated enterprise model into a standardized industrial solution stifles its spread, which requires a clinical approach and the involvement of all stakeholders. This analysis highlights the major role that consulting companies could play in disseminating the liberated enterprise model, but are unable to do so due to the incompatibility of their operating model with the liberation process' requirements.

### ***3. An eclectic explanation, a prelude to historical-institutionalism analysis***

Casalegno (2017) aims, through an eclectic reading, to demonstrate that the liberated enterprise phenomena has historical roots as well as emotional and social components. The liberated enterprise is understood as a novelistic rather than a managerial phenomenon. He hypothesizes that the phenomenon constitutes “a mythology of contestation” that expresses a profound desire for change among organizational players. The phenomenon of the liberated company is reduced to a metaphorical signifier from the collective imagination, with the purgative function of establishing more equal organizations.

“Linguistically, the combination of the two tropes (enterprise and freedom) also functions as a slogan. It resembles an “advertising cry”, which is typical of romance. As such, they can be considered ideologemes, or “polysemous and polemical semantic devices that aim to deconstruct previous statements in order to bring about a new meaning” (Casalegno, 2017). In this sense, the horrors of Taylorism were repressed in the collective unconscious for decades. However, the context contributed to the emergence of a number of alternatives, albeit a limited extent. The emergence of the “liberated company” in both in print and in practice was the most dramatic manifestation of this. The rhetoric produced has a performative ambition, thanks to its seductive effects, which will have agency effects. Because of its persuasive qualities, the discourse generated has a performative aim that will result in agency consequences.

To sum up, Casalegno acknowledges that the liberated enterprise is a myth with both a psychic and a social implications. The myth crystallizes the social hopes of a will-to-be, referring to an ideology and above all an "ideology", a concept borrowed from Kaës (2016).

Casalegno's reading is not superficial; it draws on sociology and psychoanalysis to grasp the phenomenon of the liberated enterprise as an emergent project that has its origins in the collective unconscious. Despite the eclectic nature of the approach, the historical dimension is weak, and the institutional context is not taken into account. Nonetheless, the idea of the collective unconscious, which asserts the enabling functioning of human faculties, may explain the receptive attitude of agents when the liberation process is initiated in their company.

## **Results**

### ***The neo-Schumpeterian historical explanation***

The emergence of organizational models is not an accident. The historical perspective situates each organizational innovation in the conditions of its appearance to obtain a juxtaposition of organizational devices. In order to better understand the conditions of the appearance of management models, we draw primarily on the work of Bodrožić and Adler (2018), who conduct a longitudinal study over two centuries of the evolution of management models. From a neo-Schumpeterian perspective, they demonstrate that models are solutions to problems caused by technological change. Newly growing industries are hampered by the current organizational structure, which prevents them from developing their performance: this is the “productivity paradox”. Each new technology is part of a major technological wave, and the authors list four waves since the first industrial revolution. A major technological wave consists of two cycles, the first of which develops an organizational solution, the dysfunctions of which are addressed by the solution designed during the second cycle of the same wave. Even the antagonism between models, notably Taylorism and human relations, diminishes in favor of the idea of rebalancing within the same paradigm.

The following table (Table 1) summarizes the main stages in the industry's evolution, with their associated models and the organizational paradigm corresponding to each stage.

**Table 1**  
**Waves of technological change and related management models**

Waves	Technological change	The organizational paradigm	The organizational model
Wave 1	Steam and Rail	Professionally managed company	Staff and line model
			Industrial improvement
Wave 2	Steel and electric power	The plant	Scientific management
			Human relations
Wave 3	Automotive and oil	Strategy-structure	Strategy and structure
			Quality management
Wave 4	Computers and telecommunications	Network	Business processes
			Knowledge management

*Source: designed by us, adapted from Bodrožić and Adler (2018)*

The work of Bodrožić and Adler (2018) endeavors to address the fundamental question: where do new forms of organization come from? In our view, are there historical conditions that allow the liberated enterprise to emerge in long cycles?

This way of describing evolution suggests a new way of looking at things: how can apparently competing models be better understood as complementary pairs within a common paradigm? This contradicts the common explanation for subsequent models content as a pendulum swing between rational and normative cultural antinomies, or between apogee and perigee (Thuderoy, 2006). Thus, Barley and Kunda (1992) contrast the rational model, referring to Taylorism, with the normative model, inherent in human relations.

The next wave of technological revolution, propelled by the car industry and oil, with their knock-on effects on the economy and the diversification of products in an ever-wider market, rendered the unitary structure, the “U” shape, unsuitable (A. Chandler, 1988). The productivity paradox was resolved with the invention of the new “M” organizational form, with divisions in direct management of market segments. A new organizational paradigm and model ushered in a new phase. The new “M” shape soon revealed its shortcomings, leading to “poor quality and service, low worker involvement, lack of cooperation and political maneuvering in management ranks” (Bodrožić and Adler, 2018). Aoki's “J” model (1991), with quality management, rebalances the organizational paradigm by adopting the principles of the Toyota production system.

“Successive innovations in microelectronics, computing, the Internet and, finally, mobile telephony have paved the way for new industries, a new infrastructure of digital and wireless networks, and much wider and cheaper access to information and communication channels” (Bodrožić and Adler, 2018). Alongside the change in organizational structure, strategy shifted from “corporate strategy” to “core competencies” and “strategic alliances” (Gulati et al., 2002). The business process model thus introduced a whole new organizational paradigm, the “network” (Sturgeon, 2002).

The company's transition into a nebula, with the engagement of various external entities with ambiguous boundaries, posed the risk of organizational knowledge unravelling. Knowledge management originated as a concept to address the failures of the network enterprise. In order to capitalize on experience and convert it into skills, the various stakeholders in inter-organizational processes were brought together in communities of practice (Wenger-Travner et al., 2002).

Bodrožić and Adler's (2018) description of evolution processes does not include the liberated business as a management paradigm. However, some of its qualities are stated in the last two stages of historical evolution.

The companies that adopted the liberated enterprise model faced more than just productivity challenges; for others, survival was at stake. They understood that their problem was the under-utilization of human potential in all of the company's activities, which extended beyond the productivity paradox. Despite the relevance of historical analysis, it only considers technological evolution, and organizational solutions are merely the response to an evolution in the industry and

in the organizational paradigm. However, we have come to the conclusion that the liberated enterprise does not have a precise technological and historical context that led to its emergence. In the sense that the technological factor is not the trigger for the liberation process. At the same time, what the neo-Schumpeterian analysis does not say is that organizational solutions require an institutionalism counterpart that conditions their success.

### ***Institutionalist explanations***

Technical change is certainly a driving force behind organizational transformation, but the operation is not systematic. The institutional environment plays a decisive role in the mutations described by the history of industries (Coase, 1937; Williamson, 1974). If Taylorism has spread throughout the capitalist economy not only is it supposed to achieve good performance, but an institutional environment has also been created to support its expansion. The science of organization was transformed into products marketed by consulting firms and, most importantly, into teaching content that was widely disseminated throughout the world (Midler, 1981). The institutionalist dimension of organizational change is not limited to the market sphere or to a few contingency factors; its scope is much broader. Institutional theory demonstrates that organizations are merely a reflection of their institutional environment. We need to highlight the main arguments of this theory, focusing on change as an isomorphic transformation.

### ***The logic of legitimization***

Meyer and Rowan (1977) argue that the formal structures of many organizations in post-industrial society dramatically reflect the myths of their institutional environment, rather than the demands of their professional activities. It is the belief in the superiority of a model, tool or method that motivates organizations to adopt it - this is the notion of myth. Its implementation is most importantly motivated by the added legitimacy that puts the organization in a favorable position to obtain resources or orders that increase its chances of survival. Performance is not economic, it is institutional: it is about conforming to institutionalized requirements. As a result, organizations become isomorphic with the institutionalized myths of their environment. J. W. Meyer and Rowan (1977) cite the case of American companies that obtain aid and access orders at advantageous rates because they are isomorphic with the institutional framework. In other words, it is not excellence in the trade or any kind of performance that predisposes these organizations to such privileges.

“The success of the organization therefore depends on factors other than the effective coordination and control of productive activities. Irrespective of their productive efficiency, organizations that exist in highly elaborate institutional environments and succeed in becoming isomorphic with these environments acquire the legitimacy and revenue streams necessary for survival” (Meyer and Rowan, 1983).

From this thesis, it is clear that the liberated enterprise is not isomorphic with the institutionalized context that continues to favor the proliferation of classic-type organizations. In other words, the organizational model is merely a reflection of the institutional environment, and the liberated enterprise model has not yet reached the stage of institutionalized myth. We continue our institutionalist reading with the contribution of DiMaggio and Powell (1983).

### ***Institutional isomorphism***

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) adopted and developed the idea of isomorphism, defining it as “a process of constraint that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units facing the same set of environmental conditions” (Hawley, 1968). However, they point out that the post-industrial economies’ organizations remain fundamentally bureaucratic, an apparently irreversible process that will grow until the extinction of mankind (Weber, 1968).

Institutionalist theory explains organizational change in terms of the paradox whereby rational actors make their organizations increasingly similar as they try to change them. Isomorphism takes place in “an organizational field consisting of a multitude of organizations which, as a whole, form a recognized domain of organizational life, major suppliers, consumers of resources, regulatory agencies and other organizations providing similar products” (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Isomorphic change originates from three sources of influence: coercive

isomorphism, which stems from political influence and the problem of legitimacy; mimetic isomorphism, which results from standard responses to uncertainty; and normative isomorphism, associated with professionalization.

Organizations are shaped by the isomorphic forces of an institutional environment that push them to change, sometimes unconsciously, within an organizational field. As soon as this field, made up of a multitude of organizations, is formed, isomorphic transformation is initiated under the influence of several forces that can be combined.

The first force is coercive, it is present in regulated activity and outputs subject to institutional control. Organizations conform to the rules and expectations of resource providers, an isomorphism that makes these entities legitimate and eligible for grants, subsidies and access to major orders.

The second force is mimetic: in situations of uncertainty, organizations reproduce the solutions and innovations of their leaders because they believe in their virtues, notwithstanding the evidence of their effectiveness. Many organizations have monitoring and benchmarking systems in place to make their structures isomorphic with organizations occupying a central position.

The third force is normative, stemming mainly from professionalization. Two types of institutions act as normative forces: educational and training establishments and networks of professional organizations. These institutions play a role in the socialization of actors who receive exact training that enables them to work interchangeably across organizations. Pedagogical content is identical, and the definition of organizational actors' missions becomes universal, resulting in increasingly isomorphic institutions. "To the extent that managers and key personnel are drawn from the same universities and filtered on the basis of a common set of attributes, they will tend to see problems in the same way, to regard the same policies, procedures and structures as normatively sanctioned and legitimized, and to approach decisions in the same way" (Dimaggio and Powell, 1983). Socialization has cognitive and behavioral underpinnings and operates in subtle ways, it "takes place in professional association workshops, on-the-job training programs, consultant contracts, employer networks and vocational schools, and the pages of trade magazines, socialization acts as an isomorphic force" (Dimaggio and Powell, 1983). The new institutional approach has a Durkheimian pedigree, since it results in quasi-conditioning to an institutional environment whose more or less subtle forces combine to leave little choice as to the organizational set-up to adopt.

This brings us back to the question of the existence of an institutional environment conducive to the emergence of the liberated company? More precisely, did liberated enterprises emerge thanks to a specific institutional environment? Gérard (2017), head of a liberated company, testifies to the loneliness of the leader who begins the process of liberating his company, an observation confirmed by Getz (2017). In this sense, the institutional support system did not exist during the second generation of liberated companies. Nevertheless, the rudiments of this environment were being laid, notably with Guru conferences and their publications. The liberated enterprise is expected to have its own institutional environment, with isomorphic forces contributing to its spread. We will look at these in the final section, devoted to the spread of management models.

### **Discussion**

Organizational transformation is consubstantial with the external institutional framework that impacts organizations directly and indirectly, consciously and unconsciously. What are these institutions and how do they exert their influence? Isomorphism is the main mechanism, the belt that links the organization to its institutional environment. The external institutional apparatus forces organizations to adopt structures and operating rules as a means of legitimization, enabling them to avoid reprimands and become eligible for subsidies or win substantial orders (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). An examination of institutionalist theories leads us to identify a number of institutions:

- Educational and training institutions;

- Professional organizations;
- Standardization organizations;
- Consulting firms;
- Firms holding a central position with public authorities;
- State institutions granting aid and/or exercising control.

The modern era has witnessed a growth in the number of institutions and a growing role for isomorphism. Each major phase of economic evolution generates its own institutions. Organizational transformations take place under the pressure of three institutional mechanisms: mimetic, coercive and normative.

Mimetic pressures arise in contexts of uncertainty and when organizational objectives are ambiguous. Companies tend to reproduce the solutions of their market leaders. Benchmarking mechanisms are employed in oligopolistic environments where organizational alternatives are limited. Consulting firms play a key role in disseminating organizational solutions. Coercive pressures are operational when state administrations are a direct player in an organizational field. Companies are subject to a common set of regulations that make their organization homogeneous. Normative pressures arise from professionalization, which is defined “as the collective struggle of members of a profession to define the conditions and methods of their work, to control ‘the production of producers’” (Larson, 1977).

Two actors in the standardization of professions play a key role in the dissemination of management models: academic institutions and professional networks. They are veritable machines for the production of profiles, some of which are standardized, to provide companies and administrations with the skills they need. Isomorphism is perceptible in the standardization of training content and the socialization of individuals. Training organizations act in anticipation of their customers' expectations on the job market, and standardization is such that profiles become interchangeable. At the level of employer organizations, standardization affects the content of functions and positions. Professional networks and standardization organizations are the main institutions for this standardization.

The three types of isomorphism overlap and sometimes act simultaneously. Standardization is on the increase in a number of areas: training content, job descriptions and job descriptions, budgeting methods, human resources management and so on.

What is the nature of the isomorphism needed to generate liberated companies? The emergence of this type of company went through three stages: a first generation of pioneers, from the 1950s to 2000. From the latter date until 2012, a second dynamic began with the second generation of liberated companies. The current phase is that of the third wave of liberation, and the liberated form is spreading more expansively. Getz (2017) notes an effervescence in the spread of this model in recent years, with the transformation process shrinking to 6 months. Transformation in the first two phases took longer than 24 months. What are the reasons for the rapid spread of this model?

Getz discussed the creation of an ecosystem that accompanies companies through the transformation stage. “The liberation process is so difficult that new liberator leaders will not start on it or give up along the way. That is why we have adopted a solution that consists of creating an ecosystem to serve these leaders. This ecosystem, consisting of independent but passionate players, offers: initiatory journeys in liberated companies, co-development sessions with liberating leaders, exchanges with liberation researchers and experts, self-learning resources, coaches to work on their ego and, labor law specialists and even investors wishing to financially support liberated companies (Getz, 2017).

The ecosystem is the embryo of the institutional environment. The myths are not yet institutionalized; they are conveyed by credible people whose figures testify to the performance of liberated companies. The testimonies and writings of the gurus are arguments that seduce their audience and encourage them to try the experiment, because the model brings gains and happiness for all stakeholders. (Getz and Marbacher, 2017)



Myths are not yet institutionalized; it is much more a question of a reality carried by people and figures as well as communities of practice. Consulting firms are beginning to reappropriate this model as a commercial product (Bretones et al., 2020). The ecosystem is an aspect of the institutional environment that is growing in scope to give rise to other institutions, including adapted training content and appropriate management solutions. Allard and Bravo (2020) denounce the Taylorized nature of teaching and propose the creation of an empowering training environment, which prepares and empowers students to work in the liberated enterprise.

Part of the institutional set-up has emerged thanks to the deliberate strategies and actions of the players campaigning for liberation. Other institutions, such as training courses, are still lacking.

The ecosystem created is made up of :

- Coaches and trainers for transforming leaders;
- Accompaniment in the transformation process by experienced managers;
- Management applications that facilitate the operations required for this type of business;
- The first consulting firms have appeared, occupying a niche in a standardized market;
- Financing to support the transformation operation;
- The first elements of a professional network appear;
- The scale of this ecosystem is not very large, and institutionalization is still in its infancy.

### **Conclusion**

The literature on the liberated enterprise (Jacquinot & Pellissier-Tanon, 2015; Gilbert, Raullet-Croset & Teglberg, 2017; Rousseau & Ruffier, 2017; Casalegno, 2017; Bretones, Pinault & Trannoy, 2020) has not been able to explain why this model did not spread in the first two phases mentioned above. The same is true of works devoted to the diffusion of management models (Midler, 1986; Abrahamson, 1996; Bensebaa & Autissier, 2011; Desreumaux, 2015; Zerbib, 2011; Bodrožić & Adler, 2018). Other approaches explain the non-adoption of radical organizational innovations by the persistence of the hierarchical model, for a variety of reasons. McGregor (1960) refers to leaders' beliefs attached to the "X" model, Semler (1993) explains it by the problem of education and Senge et al. (1999) mention the inability to learn.

Our aim has been to move away from the uni-factorial explanation and draw on other paradigms, notably historical and institutionalism, in order to grasp the phenomenon in time and space. Modern institutionalist theory justifies the emergence and spread of a new management model by the emergence of an institutional field that compels related companies to adopt this model via the isomorphic mechanism. The performance achieved by the liberated enterprise was not a sufficient argument for its spread. This is to the advantage of institutionalist explanations (Dimaggio and Powell, 1983; Meyer and Rowan, 1977), which put forward the idea of institutional myth, managerial practices that spread because they provide legitimacy, without necessarily being successful. Before outlining the results of our reflection, we will successively highlight the main arguments of the above-mentioned non-institutionalist approaches, which, despite their relevance, remain inconsistent when faced with the problem of diffusion.

The analysis of fashion has some similarities with Casalegno (2017) novelistic and psychoanalytical explanation, in which the term "Liberated Enterprise" is a slogan, an advertising scream that expresses social disarray and allows an ideal to emerge. This is an interesting reading of the social phenomenon, but it does not explain why the mutation towards this model has been sluggish. Meanwhile, the model crystallizes unspoken social expectations, which may be seen in people's enthusiasm when their company begins the process of liberation.

Bodrožić and Adler's (2018) neo-Schumpeterian historical analysis charts a long evolution of the main models in contemporary times. No allusion was made to the liberated enterprise in the series of correlations between technologies and organizational innovations. This study reveals that the liberated enterprise model has no precise technological context; it is a solution adopted by a variety of organizations in all sectors, even large companies are opting for this new philosophy. What the authors of this approach don't say is that each stage of industrial evolution has its own institutional set-up. In the sense that the success of economic transformation depends on the

creation of appropriate institutions to support the new management style. The latter has remained fundamentally at the service of the classic model, despite new innovative solutions. The particularity of the liberated enterprise is the radical questioning of the classic model, which is maintained thanks to a culture and institutional environment devoted to it.

Such radical organizational innovation calls for major institutional change, notably in teaching methods, professional organizations, government agencies (which must grant greater legitimacy to companies practicing this management approach) and consulting firms. At present, the promoters of this philosophy are working together to establish the first support institutions. The increase in the population of liberated companies is subsequent to the creation of their ecosystem, from 2012 onwards. This confirms our assumption that institutional arrangements play a decisive role in the spread of management models.

Mimetic isomorphism seems to be the institutional mechanism at work in the multiplication of the liberated form. Business leaders are fascinated by the discourse of gurus and ask for coaching to bring about organizational change (Gérard, 2017). As for coercive isomorphism, it does not yet operate in diffusion, unlike the normative isomorphism perceptible in certain modes of teaching using entrepreneurial education (Zakariya et al., 2022). Invisible institutions in the sense of Arrow (1974) remain dedicated to reproducing the classical model, while a small proportion are moving towards the liberating model.

A more expansive diffusion is strongly conditioned by broader ecosystems that encourage institutions to take on the concerns of the liberating enterprise in terms of training, skills standardization and support for organizational change. Perhaps strong demand, emanating from candidate companies for liberation that form organizational fields (Dimaggio and Powell, 1983), will generate more institutions dedicated to this transformation. Ultimately, we suggest that more numerous and denser organizational fields, in terms of the populations of this type of company, will exert institutional transformation pressures in favor of the liberated enterprise model. In other words, it's not so much institutions that shape organizations as the size of the organizational fields of liberated enterprises that will bring about the emergence of institutions suitable for their propagation. This is a research perspective that inverts the problematic of the present paper. In the sense that it is not the institutional environment that drives, or even constrains, the adoption of given organizational models, it is the pressure emanating from the population of liberated enterprises that is at the root of a more consistent institutional environment which, in turn, propagates the liberated enterprise model.

Our work is much more a reflection born of our dissatisfaction with the explanations for the spread of the liberated enterprise. We have drawn on the biographies of liberated entrepreneurs, notably Zobrist (2014; 2020), A. Gérard (2017) as well as the experiences recounted by I. Getz (2017), F. Laloux (2020) and Bretones et al. (2020). Recent facts, experiences and developments largely support institutionalism arguments as to the logic underlying the spread of management models. Nevertheless, our conclusions need to be validated by more systemic studies.

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