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1

Introduction: Travelling in Time and Space on the Winds of the Transition

Mihaela Kelemen and Monika Kostera

This is an unconventional book. Hence the way in which we start our introductory chapter. Here is Mihaela's story.

I was living in Romania when the country's communist system was overthrown in December 1989. I was in fact a full time student at Academy of Economic Studies in Bucharest. In November that year, I somehow managed to catch hepatitis and was sent to recover to my parents' town, in Southern Transylvania. I was miles away from the epicentre of the revolt, tucked away in a small town where nothing really happened during that time. As I was not allowed to get out of bed (let alone the house), my only contact with what was going on in Bucharest and other big cities was through radio and television. I remember watching the news with a constant sense of bewilderment and thinking it was not real, it could not be real. There was fear, relief, hope and uneasiness in what I was seeing. It felt as if I was on the edge between dream and reality. One year later, I went to the UK to do a doctorate. A decade later I work and still live in the UK. Thus, my experience of the ups and downs of Romanian contemporary history are not embodied, but rather seen through the eyes of my relatives and friends, and well as through the lens of the people I interviewed and observed in my research. It is not an impressive story to tell and yet it has some fascinating undertones: it is a story about struggle and freedom, equality and inequality, fairness and unfairness, poverty and wealth, corruption and professionalism. Yet, the most fulfilling human projects are inseparable from a degree of torment and pain: we should not be embarrassed by such difficulties, only by the failure to grow anything beautiful from them.

Here is Monika's story.

I was living in Poland when the Berlin Wall fell. Before it happened, the first democratic elections since World War II were proclaimed in Poland, and the anti-totalitarian opposition, represented by Solidarnosc, won overwhelmingly. One by one the countries of the Eastern Bloc were declaring their independence from the Soviet Union and the breach from the totalitarian system. On New Year's Eve 1989, I went out into the streets of Warsaw, shouting 'Free Europe!' together with a euphoric crowd. What was happening seemed impossible, magical, powerful, like an experience of enlightenment shared with thousands, perhaps millions of other people. Everything seemed possible then as we were finally free to live and think, to do things, to invent things, because, as the Solidarnosc people said on the TV, 'We are now in our own home.' Since then many things have happened, mostly disappointing my dreams. Europe is free from Soviet domination but it can be quite a sinister place – the mass murders in former Yugoslavia are a chilling illustration of my point. The Berlin Wall fell but an invisible wall remains, often making it difficult if not impossible to engage in meaningful cooperation with Western partners or to take responsibility for a shared future. The wall is external – we, Easterners, encounter many problems with making our voice heard in the West. It is also internal – we act as if we wanted to appropriate the most orthodox, old-fashioned and dogmatic Western ideas in our countries and as if we had nothing to say on our own. I still live and work in Poland, the country of the raging hypocrisy of the epoch of the First Secretary Edward Gierek, the country of the heroic solidarity of Solidarnosc ... I feel that many aspects of the Polish culture are yet to be revealed, many epochs are yet to come.

The traditional view on transition

Discourses of economic reform in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) place a significant emphasis on the adoption of mainstream Western management theories and the development of managers whose skills and competences mimic those of the Western manager. Western consultants and academics are called upon to prescribe 'the best way' for managing organizational and personal change as well as the values that are to govern the 'reformed' enterprise, its managers and employees (Jankowicz, 1993; 1994; Kelemen, 1999; Kostera, 1995a,b). However, the 'best way' does not always account for differences in the economic, political and socio-cultural backgrounds of Eastern

European countries (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1994a; Kozminski, 1993). The too often hegemonic vision of American management knowledge, which is the most dominant mainstream approach in Western management, attempts to insert a 'one best way' in Eastern Europe, that overlooks the fact that certain managerial and organizational practices developed locally may be more appropriate and indeed more effective within this particular setting (Kelemen, 1999).

After over ten years of various projects aimed at cooperation, inclusion, mutual understanding or just plainly commerce and numerous conferences, publications, (inter-)governmental actions and plans, can we now speak of a maturation of the East–West integration discourse and relationship? Both East and West Europeans are conscious of the 'other half's' existence and soon the European Union (EU) may embrace its first East European members. Therefore it is important to re-evaluate and rethink the lessons we have learned since the fall of the Berlin Wall. This book is dedicated to such conscious reflections and self-reflections, by Western and Eastern (and borderline: those who are natives of Eastern Europe but work in the West and vice-versa) authors. There still is and there always will be a division between the East and the West. However, this division is no longer an insurmountable obstacle but a resource to be drawn upon in positive and productive ways by both parties.

Making sense of the transition

This book offers, with the help of a cultural perspective, an understanding of the mentality in which management ideas are embedded in the East European countries undergoing what is often referred to as processes of transition. We focus on the role played by knowledge and power in the construction of social reality and are interested in the complex relation between societal and organizational practice and individual and group identity.

The book is based on a model of transition that traces ideas in use to both past and present as well as to Western and local knowledge. Actors interpret ideas in use through an identification of what they do and through attempts at making the existing processes meaningful and recognizable. Through their talk and action, they construct the everyday reality of the transition to a market economy. This book seeks to present these processes and ideas without the normative frame typical of mainstream management literature. In other words, this book is about how things are and how they could be, but not about how they

should be. There is no 'one best idea' about how reality should be; in fact, these ideas differ from individual to individual, from organization to organization, from context to context. The role of normative discourse differs from, and indeed may be contrary to the role of understanding. The latter is crucial for reflection. Without understanding there is no reflection or imagination – both are necessary for the art of creative management (Morgan, 1993).

This book brings together a collection of articles that question the centrality of mainstream Western management orthodoxy in the constitution and expression of identity at both organizational and individual level in Eastern Europe. The commonly accepted position that mainstream Western management thought (disseminated typically via consultancy models) is crucial to the success of economic reform in Eastern Europe is problematized together with the universality of such models and the mechanistic ways in which they have been exported to, and tried out in, Eastern European organizations. Generally speaking, we subscribe to the common view that economic policy should be formulated in light of global economic priorities and concerns, but we also argue in this book that economic reform must first and foremost subscribe to and be commensurable with local societal and cultural values. These two types of requirements, one derived from technical rationality, the other one from cultural expectations are not necessarily incompatible.

The structure of the book is based on the model of management in transition shown in Figure 1.1. This view suggests that organizational actors make sense of the transition by constantly juxtaposing ideas regarding the past and the present and drawing on both Western and local knowledge resources. The result is typically embedded in the culture; thus culture is our main epistemological metaphor used consistently in the whole book (throughout this book we use Karl Weick's, 1995a, idea of sensemaking in management). Sensemaking at the crossover between these various ideas is understood here as identification, that is, an active quest for something that is relatively stable and recognizable to the individual.

The process of making sense of the transition presupposes the active translation of many concurrent ideas (Czarniawska and Sevón, 1996; Latour, 1986) that move through space: between their own space (local) and the foreign (Western) space, and through time: between their own time (the present) and the time that has passed (the past). Thus, the transition could be reimagined as a complex pattern of the interspatial and intertemporal travels of ideas.

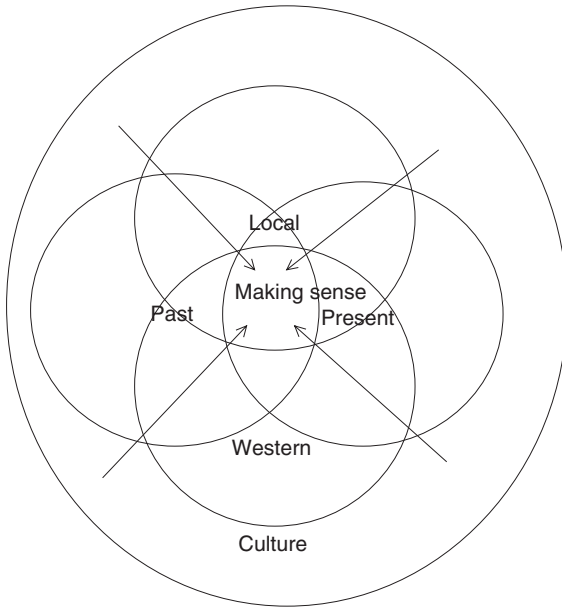


Figure 1.1 Management in transition

The chapters represent a wide geographical spread, including the following countries: Russia and NIS (The Newly Independent States), East Germany, Romania, Bulgaria, Poland, The Czech Republic and Hungary. Some of the researchers are natives of CEE working in Eastern or Western Europe, others are Western researchers. The chapters reflect the current research interest of the individual authors and the international diversity of critical Eastern European management scholarship. The book is focused mainly on the relationship between Western and local ideas and how they influence and are being influenced by current ideologies, power relations, and discourses. Section 1 entitled, 'Stories of Change: Organizing Identities' takes a macro perspective and analyses current changes taking place in organizational and management practices; Section II, entitled 'Stories of The Past: Lost And Found Identities' emphasizes the role played by past and present in the constitution of individual identities. In Section III, entitled, 'Managing the Transition: Crossovers in Practice and Representation', we highlight the potential synergies between local and foreign ways of thinking and organizing.

These three sections correspond with three broad themes. The first theme explores processes of organizational change and their conse-

quences upon organizational identity. The transition to a market economy places a critical emphasis on the development of anti-bureaucratic and flexible forms of organization (Kelemen and Lightfoot, 2000). Thus, the reformed organization is seen to espouse values which are a far cry from those promoted by the socialist enterprise. The latter stressed collective ownership, equality between employees, meeting the requirements of the central plan, and the effectiveness of managers as state administrators. On the contrary, the reformed organization builds upon values emphasizing individual responsibility, market competition and managerial entrepreneurship (Kelemen and Hristov, 1998). The first part of this book explores the processes by which, and the extent to which, organizational and management practices in Eastern Europe adhere to such values. Both successful and failed cases are drawn upon in order to highlight the complexities involved in cultural change and the indeterminate and unpredictable nature of its outcomes.

Anna Soulsby, for example, in the chapter entitled 'The Impact of Societal Transformation on Czech Managers: A Study of Post-Communist Careers' explores the changing patterns of Czech managerial careers and the ways they have been affected by structural, societal factors as well as individual decision-making. In Chapter 2, 'Geographic Space, Banking Knowledge, and Transformation', Herbert Kalthoff explores the ways in which international commercial banks draw up 'feasibility studies' on which they base their decision to expand their operative network in Central and Eastern Europe through the establishment of branch offices and subsidiaries. He argues that such studies are by no means objective ways of classifying space in economic terms; rather they are highly subjective and rhetorical. Karin Svedberg Nilsson tells a story of how new accounting practices affected the power relationships between two organizations, thereby encouraging organizational reconstruction. Her chapter is based on a case study of a Western acquisition in the former German Democratic Republic. The new accounting practices led to changes in internal power relationships and consequently to a transformation of individual and organizational identities. In the chapter 'From Social Movements to Identity Transformation' Iris Aaltio-Marjosola, Lembit Turnpuu, and Mari Kooskora advocate an identity-based understanding of management education. Their comparative study of Finnish and Estonian values documents the ways in which management education serves as a tool of identity making for the individuals involved.

The second theme focuses on the impact of the transition upon the cultural context and heritage from the past in the experiences of managers, entrepreneurs, and other (more peripheral and marginalized) categories of individuals such as women, the unemployed, and the retired. Competent managerial and entrepreneurial behaviour is considered essential to a successful reform, and so it is important for the way in which individual professional identities are being constituted. Individuals who respond positively and conform to these expectations are constituted as central to the effective functioning of the economy and rewarded accordingly, while those who do not conform are marginalized (via economic and social mechanisms) and pushed to the periphery of the society (women, for example) (Kelemen and Lightfoot, 2000). We do not believe in the division between core and peripheral identities – we challenge the construction of such a division by providing insights into the complex ways in which individuals, be they managers, entrepreneurs, unemployed or women, interpret the transition to a market economy and cope with its complexities on a daily basis.

Aneta Pavlenko in her chapter entitled 'Socioeconomic Conditions and Discursive Construction of Women's Identities in Post-Soviet countries' focuses on the concept of womanhood as it is constituted, transformed and redefined in post-Soviet discourses. The chapter compares the political and economic situation of women in Soviet and in post-Soviet times, linking socioeconomic conditions to the discursive positions assigned to women by existing pre-eminent ideologies before and after 1991. Monika Kostera in the chapter entitled 'Control: Accounting for the Lost Innocence' shows how Polish management students make sense of the term control, often adopting irony, subversion or distrust in the short stories they were asked to write about it. This is related to the recent communist history, where control was by no means a benevolent phenomenon. Mihaela Kelemen in the chapter entitled: 'Re-inventing the Past: Stories about Communism and the Transition to a Market Economy in Romania', organizes her stories in three broad types: stories of regret, emphasizing loss; stories of relief, highlighting optimism for a better future; and stories of uncertainty, contesting whether the path of change from socialism to free-market economy has indeed made a difference to people. This chapter is concerned with the private dimension of the transition, highlighting the important role played by past, present and future in the process of individual sensemaking.

The third broad theme explores the construction of solutions to transitional problems which seem to emerge at the intersection between

past and present experiences as well as the interplay between local and imported knowledge. These solutions are in fact ways of coping and work only as long as they allow individuals to place the experience of the transition within their own frames of experience. In most cases, such ways of coping account for both the collective nature of Eastern European societies as well as the individualistic demands of a market driven culture. In 'Local problems and Foreign Solutions: Issues of Management Training in Russia and NIS' Bruno Grancelli explores the problem of whether and to what extent foreign assistance can help form the cultural capital needed for the transition to the market economy in the former USSR. He shows that it can indeed be very useful. Though he believes in the dialogue between East and West, he examines the ways in which East European actors themselves prefer to know about more or less 'orthodox' Western management and to adapt it to their problems. Henriett Primecz presents a case study of an American multinational company operating in Hungary. She focuses on a cross-cultural comparison between expatriates and Hungarians, showing that neither the so-called American business culture nor the authentic local culture has managed to prevail over the other. Thus, there is no integrative culture to speak of. The picture is rather fragmented and ambiguous, but with considerable constructive potential. This culture seems to work well for the actors, therefore the need for 'a strong unified culture' is more of a myth than the desired reality. The last chapter by Jerzy Kociatkiewicz and Monika Kostera shows how Polish actors make sense of the symbolic date of the systemic shift (that is, the collapse of communism in Poland) and how they translate possibilities of change into a space for everyday action. The actors chose to see the shift as something known, under control, rather than discover its innovative potential. The authors look for parallels in the science fiction and fantasy literature – a genre dealing with the impossible and the unheard of. This chapter concludes the book.

An unfinished story?!

As the above overview shows, the book focuses simultaneously on descriptions of practice and representations (what actors do and what they say they do and why (Czarniawska, 2001)), as well as underlying theories. The creative juxtaposition of ideas regarding the construction of the 'transition' is presented as a contextualized yet practically useful process, which allows the authors to trace the role of past and present experiences, local and foreign knowledge in the constitution of the

practice and representation of the transition. The chapters are concerned not only with a deeper understanding of the way people act and think in Eastern European organizations; they also attempt to inspire the pursuit of innovative ways of managing and organizing based on a reflexive dialogue between the East and the West. Many of the chapters, without normatively prescribing solutions and telling individuals what they should do, unpack in a creative and reflexive way the context of the transition.

Management recipe books are mainly based on representations, that is, they tell the readers about what successful managers say they do. Researchers have repeatedly shown that managers do not do what they say (see, for example, Mintzberg, 1975). The reason why they say one thing and do another is that practice and representation are based on a different kind of knowledge, or, some would claim, on different kinds of logic (Czarniawska, 2001). Barbara Czarniawska explains that the logic of practice is constructionist, 'that is, it creates and recreates its own rules in each instance of use' (p. 256). It is concrete, typically based on tacit knowledge, often uses narrative knowledge and has pragmatic or aesthetic evaluation criteria. The logic of representation tends to follow formal rationality – it employs ostensive definitions (fixed definitions that say 'what reality is really like'). It is abstract, rhetorically accomplished, and uses stylized narrative knowledge, and formal rationality as main organizing devices. Furthermore, theory is different from both practice and representation, even though it may reflect on both. Theory tends to hide its rhetorical dimension, making claims to use formal logic. The burgeoning number of management recipe books, that is, books not acknowledging the distinction between practice, representation, and theory abound on the market and do, in our opinion, more harm than good. At best, the advice they offer could be regarded as nice aeroplane reading, at worst, if taken seriously, they may trigger in the Eastern European manager a bad conscience and feelings of inferiority. The way management and organization practices are represented in such books cannot be translated into practice whether we talk about the East or the West.

In this book we avoid telling the actors what they should and should not do. Instead, we present stories of practices, collections of representations (how individuals portray themselves), and theories (how researchers portray their subjects) in order to construct a conceptual model of the transition, which can be used by researchers and practitioners to reflect upon and contextualize their experiences.

If archetypes and stereotypes are embedded in mentality, their understanding require first and foremost an unpacking of such mentality, a position which is very much lacking in mainstream literature on Central and Eastern European countries. This is, we believe, both the conceptual and practical (in terms of innovative practice) value of a critical and postmodern approach to Central and Eastern European studies.

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