

Differentiating Patterns in Work and Organizational Psychology in the Central and East European Countries

Ute Schmidt-Brasse

PSYCON Psychological Business Consultants
Germany
schmidt-brasse@psycon.de

Ute Schmidt-Brasse, owner of PSYCON® Psychologische Unternehmensberatung in Wildeshausen, Germany, is an experienced work and organizational psychology consultant, based in North West Germany and working throughout the Federal Republic and Europe, with some stress on CEE countries. Her main areas are organizational, team, personnel development, coaching, and inter-cultural consulting.

Abstract

As a means of differentiation, after some words on the role of discussant, the paper presents the concept of "Civilisational competence" (Piotr Sztompka 1993; Frane Adam, 2005). As a background the paper uses four components of civilisational competence: a) work and vocational ethic; b) capacity and motivation for collective action and self-organisation; c) internalisation of formal-legal and bureaucratic discipline; and d) basic functional knowledge. The paper highlights furthering and detrimental aspects for Work and Organizational Psychology (WOP) from literature and experience and then looks for examples for these aspects in the presentations of this symposium before inviting the audience for discussion.

How I understand my role of discussant

Accepting Barbara Kożusznik's invitation to the role of discussant of this Invited Symposium gives me the most welcome opportunity to underpin the congenial cooperation with academic and practitioner colleagues from Central and Eastern Europe during the last 15 years. Coming from Western Europe, I will look at the presentations of the symposium from an outward position. I will try to identify aspects of development of WOP in Central and East European (CEE) countries which emerge across the abstracts and arrange the papers in a broader context. My role will be rather structuring the contents of the presentations from a meta-level than sharing findings.

"Civilisational Competence" as a concept of differentiation

WOP in Central and Eastern Europe – to me that means general common grounds of WOP, but also differences. At first glance, the similarities are connected somehow with the past because of the communist historical backgrounds. But, significant differences are due to different pre-communist legacies and different types of central planning.

Looking for a means of differentiation I came across the concept of civilisational competence, first outlined by the Polish sociologist Piotr Sztompka (1993) and later operationalised by the Slovenian cultural scientist Frane Adam. He (2005, p. 80 ff) understands "civilisational competence ... as a psycho-cultural and socialisation pattern which has been sedimented and transmitted from generation to generation, which may be accumulated, and which is in certain circumstances open for innovative change (invention of tradition). It is a latent structure of cognitive, normative, expressive and motivational elements which enables individuals and social communities to orient themselves in the different subsystems of modern (or modernising) societies. In this context, one could employ the term *cultural map*". Greater civilisational competence thus results in a more elaborate map enabling people affected to deal with "the labyrinths of new demands and social changes" more easily than others. Weak or missing

civilisational competence makes it more difficult and time-consuming to adapt, it costs more and tends to waste resources. Adam identifies four important dimensions of civilisational competence which can help to distinguish the different kinds of development in the CEE countries: a) work and vocational ethics; b) capacity and motivation for collective action and self-organisation; c) internalisation of formal-legal and bureaucratic discipline; and d) basic functional knowledge.

Work and vocational ethic

Concerning the CEE parts of Europe Adam (p. 82) states that the “Czech lands and later (interwar) Czechoslovakia as the most industrialised region formed and inherited well founded work and vocational ethics which was later undermined in communist planned state-owned economy. Because of less rigid and less collectivist character of Yugoslav and (later) Hungarian communist regimes accompanied by more private initiative and autonomy at the work place, it can be assumed that Slovenia and Hungary have some advantage in work and vocational ethics as well as in managerial competencies”.

Capacity and motivation for collective action and self-organisation

Due to tradition dating from Austro-Hungarian monarchy times, people in the Czech Republic, in Slovakia and Slovenia tend to be quite strong in all forms of organised sociability. According to Adam (p. 82) “this can be explained by the impact of in-herited civic participation from earlier periods” whereas communism subverted self-control and self-initiative.

Internalisation of formal-legal and bureaucratic discipline

Much the same, the regions belonging to the Austro-Hungarian monarchy conserved somehow more appropriate patterns with regard to formal-legal and bureaucratic discipline than other CEE regions. Also the national independence achieved in this part of Europe after World War I had positive impacts, “especially in the case of (interwar) Czechoslovakia, which was able to preserve its democratic and “Rechts-staat” character until the communist takeover in 1948” (p.83).

Basic functional knowledge

Also regarding basic functional knowledge (it “allows individuals and communities an elemental understanding of social changes and enables them to adapt more easily to them”, p.83), again “the regions under the Austro-Hungarian rule inherited relatively good dispositions ... Under the communist regime the educational system expanded but its quality and openness toward new ideas was in many aspects questionable” (p. 83).

CEE WOP aspects from experience and literature

After these general and basic explanations and differentiations, it is now time to look at special WOP issues which have to be seen relative to the respective background.

In general, there seems to be an excellent scholarly basis with long-standing tradition, especially in work psychology. The range of topics is dynamically spreading into other fields of WOP common in the West as well, e.g. organizational and management, personnel psychology and economical psychology. Consistently, there is an enormous increase of interest in seeking information and collaboration since the early 1980s especially with Western researchers and practitioners (e.g. ENOP, EAWOP, German experience exchange groups across boundaries). This development is backed by rapidly growing language skills towards Western languages.

Different from Western usances and doubtlessly due to very low university wages, many researchers are parallelly working as independent freelance consultants, concretely applying results and cross-checking feasibility of their research work in down-to-earth projects. This very often gives at least part of their work a pragmatic touch off the “ivory tower”.

Another development to be observed is the proceeding professionalism of WOP in CEE countries by founding professional associations, installing curricula, editing journals, holding conferences, and trying to have a professional impact on legislation.

Detrimental aspects

Very often, the allocation of university funds and promotion are unreliable and not transparent. This suggests in a way that old research elites, political party cronyism, and personal relations still are playing an important role. Accordingly, for special demands or projects, the CEE WOP colleagues are depending on foreign money and sponsoring.

As we have already seen before, due to political circumstances organizational psychology is a young field of research and application in real day-to-day work is partially still in a learning phase. This leads sometimes to the fact - especially since 1990 - that Eastern-Western research collaboration is sought much more often than the "old" Eastern-Eastern collaborations. This bears the danger of excluding non-EU countries due to rare funding possibilities as well as to be geared to Western patterns and to underrate peer research in the CEE countries. WOP colleagues observing this tendency are consciously trying to alter it by many formal and informal means; but lacking infrastructure to organise their efforts is a severe obstacle.

Examples for these aspects in the papers of this symposium

We will now turn to the five presentations of the symposium - referred to mostly by the abstracts - and scrutinise them for the dimensions and aspects mentioned:

Lyudmila Karamushka, Ukraine:

Mains trends in development of Organizational and Work Psychology in Ukraine

Karamushka introduced us to *Organizational and Work Psychology as a relatively new and dynamically developing field of psychological science in Ukraine*. She described the whole systematic process of initiating and planning, implementing, networking, and professionalising and understood all this in the context of European Integration - not forgetting about their Eastern European neighbours (e.g. supporting Belarus development).

Zoltán Bogáthy et al., Romania:

Managerial Competency and Efficiency in Romanian Organisations (in this issue substituted by Zoltán Bogáthy et al. 2007: "The Role of Emotions in Organizational Behaviour")

One key sentence in Bogáthy et al.'s contribution for me was: *Romanian managers are not well prepared to perform as managers*. And well matching the aspects discussed a little while ago, this is explained partly by political party cronyism for managers before 1989. A second explanation is the field of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Development being new and still without a tradition of seeking advice and applying WOP research and experiential results to "normal" companies. Thirdly, Bogáthy points to a lack of Human Resources and supporting infrastructure. And there is a warning, too: Do not just impose foreign structures, it won't work!

Mare Teichmann et al., Estonia:

Eastern European versus Western Control Beliefs at Work

Teichmann's contribution is an impressive example of the collaboration with Western researchers. Comparing control beliefs at work, she found that – congruent with the findings on Eastern European history influence - *all samples of Eastern European managers have more external work locus of control than Western ones* and that in the follow-up 8 years later in fact *internal work locus of control has become more influential but there was no significant mean difference*. There is a perspective, though: *Younger Estonian managers have more internal work locus of control and internal way of thinking and acting*.

Barbara Kożusznik, Poland:

Psychosocial problems of managers and employees in Polish organisations

A “Company in the process of transition and change“, What are the “psychological, emotional and social factors influencing workers’ behaviour”? and the proposal of “practical solutions of psycho-social and psycho-emotional problems ...” were the issues of Kożusznik’s hands-on contribution, offering a tool how to analyse and means how to break the vicious circle in this company by enhancing the information system, improving work motivation and human resources management, developing managerial competences as well as trust in the top.

References

- Frane Adam. History, culture and economic development. The case of East-Central Europe. In: Zdenka Mansfeldová/Vera Sparschuh/Agnieszka Wenniger (Eds.), p. 71-94.
- Frank Brück. Interkulturelles Management. Frankfurt/London: IKO-Verlag 2002.
- Hungarian Psychological Association. The current status of Applied Psychology in Hungary, http://www.mpt.hu/en_custa.html
- Alexandra, I. & Popescu, B. (2005, May). Interview with Cary L. Cooper. Europe's Journal of Psychology. http://www.ejop.org/archives/2005/05/interview_with_3.html
- Informationszentrum Sozialwissenschaften der Arbeitsgemeinschaft Sozialwissenschaftlicher Institute e.V. (ASI) (Eds.). Workshop: The East-European Social Sciences: Research Conditions and the Role of Information/Communication. IZ-Arbeitsbericht Nr. 33, Informationszentrum Sozialwissenschaften, Bonn März 2004.
- Karamushka, L. (2006, March). The role of ENOP in promotion of Organizational and Work Psychology in Ukraine. In: *ENOP Newsletter* No. 50, <http://www.ucm.es/info/Psyap/enop/enopnewsletter501.pdf>
- Zdenka Mansfeldová/Vera Sparschuh/Agnieszka Wenniger (Eds.). *Patterns of Europeanisation in Central and Eastern Europe*. Beiträge zur Osteuropaforschung, Bd. 10, Reinhold Krämer Verlag, Hamburg 2005.
- Renģe, V., & Sebre, S. (2006, June). *Welcome message* for the VII International Baltic Psychology Conference: Baltic Psychology in Global Context: Where Do We Stand? Riga, Latvia. http://www.ppf.lu.lv/ibpc/files/IBPC-VII_4th_Announcement.doc
- Piotr Sztompka (1993). Civilisational Incompetence: the Trap of Postcommunist Societies”. *Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, vol. 22, No.2, 88.
- Bernhard Wilpert. *Program Activities*. Paris, May 1994, <http://www.ucm.es/info/Psyap/enop/enop1.html>
-

And now:



Your contributions and opinions, please!

Please send your comments and points of discussion about the material to the individual authors of each paper (their e-mail address is on the first page of the article) and send your general comments and opinions about the e-journal to:

Ute Schmidt-Brasse schmidt-brasse@psycon.de or
Dr Angela Carter angela_carter@justdevelopment.co.uk.

We are also waiting for your contributions!

Thank you!