

Management ideology - off the shelf?

The continent of Europe may be noted for its diversity in many respects; in its geography, its languages, and through its variation in historical and cultural tradition. In the field of management and organisation, diversity is apparent also. Organisational forms and cultures may proliferate, but perhaps some of the more poignant contrasts relate to power distribution, and, more specifically, the extent to which the exertion of unilateral managerial power is tolerated within organisations or by societies.

Within Europe, the contrasting ideologies of power sharing between organisational „stakeholders“, and of setting management „free to manage“, represent the seemingly „do or die“ adversaries in the Euro political arena.

Over the past decade and a half in the U.K., the march has been towards the injection of market forces into most aspects of national life. Government has eschewed active involvement into national economic management as a policy goal, whilst it has nevertheless been the hand- maiden to the deregulation of monopolistic obstructions to the free flow of market forces. Nationalised and public industries have been privatised, and the activities of organised labour severely circumscribed through pervasive legal intervention into union affairs. The dominant, if somewhat idealistic, theoretical construct has been of the individual employee entering into a contract with the employer to reflect the market value of the unit of labour over the period of service.

Much of this has been inspired by North American management theory and practice. Over the Atlantic, the creeds of individualism, self determination and achievement, and a correspondingly low profile for the state, have represented central ideological precepts within society and employment. These values have been apparent throughout the history of management literature. In the 1960s Frederick Herzberg connected high levels of employee motivation with the scope for personal achievement and advancement, and with the realisation of „self actualisation“. More recently, the U.S. management „gurus“, have breathed more life into the American managerial dream, by reinforcing the message that corporate destinies lay firmly in management's own hands. That closely knit business cultures, inspired by powerful and charismatic leaders, could revive U.S. economic fortunes, seemed to strike an emotional chord with managers far beyond American shores.

Yet, these ideological and cultural foundations for management thinking are less evident on the continent of Europe. Here, the „Social Partnership“ model implies power sharing between the major economic interest groups, the State and organised labour joining management in codetermining business and employment decisions. Consensus forms of decision making not only coincide with mature conceptions of social democracy, but are also consistent with the notion of constraining the wilder machinations of the market in dictating

national, corporate and personal destinies. In the political economies resting upon corporatist principles, the „Social Partners“ attempt to mould the interplay of market forces to suit the longer term objectives of each major interest group, including that of organised labour.

Not surprisingly, in the wake of political and economic moves to bind Europe more closely together, the continued co-existence of conflicting ideologies has proven problematic. In the field of employment, this has been perhaps most evident in the non- adoption of the Social Protocol within the Maastricht Treaty by the U.K. Those favouring the Protocol would prefer the application of a minimum set of employment standards across Europe to deter „social dumping“. In contrast, the U.K. government

would resent external intrusions into the exertion of „managerial prerogative“, and into the favoured dynamic of individuals pricing themselves into jobs.

Yet across Europe, there is some evidence that the deregulation agenda is gaining ground. This may be, in part, due to the recognition that Europe as an entity has to compete cost effectively with other world trade blocs, and in particular, with the emerging Pacific Rim economies. In this context, there is a continuous call for greater flexibility in the deployment of labour.

To accompany this, American management philosophy continues to seduce many European managers not only through its plausibility, but also through its mystique, and this gains a more tangible form in the practices and cultures of American owned multinationals now operating in Eastern and Western Europe.

In charting a way forward, however, for the changing economies of Eastern Europe, one would advise against being over inspired by single models and folklores of capitalism. Instead, „role models“ should perhaps be primarily influenced by the unique traditions and circumstances of each nation state, and by the knowledge that Europe, whilst representing a „melting pot“, still provides varied terrain for a diversity of organisational typologies and of prescriptions for change.

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