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## About limits to globalised teaching methodologies. Learnings for EU educators

### THE PROBLEM

A phenomenon of economic globalisation from the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the process of internationalisation that can be perceived in education but, most of all, in management training. In addition to this, due to the recent accession to the EU an adaptational constraint stronger than spontaneous internationalisation can be felt in the east and central European region – thus also in Hungary. This was called *imperative of matching* by OLDROYD (2003).

Hungary's integration with the EU is sure to strengthen those defects of adaptation that partly originate from the weaknesses of management training in the new member countries. We, teachers of this region who are active participants of Hungarian higher business education, can see the premonitory signs of this challenge even now. In other words, as far as a part of the problems is concerned we have already long ago joined the European Union.

The new environment in management training expects solutions from the new members in a number of areas: among others in *interdisciplinarity*, *teaching technology* and *intercultural adaptation*. None of these is an exclusively European "invention" but rather a worldwide trend. Every institution can feel this in the course of internationalisation. But after the enlargement of the EU the economic

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and educational atmosphere that we are working in does not offer this adaptation as a possibility but it is rather “prescribed” as a compulsory task to be performed. This article is searching for the answer to the question what this actually means for teachers in management training. At this point the term “management training” needs to be specified: for the sake of simplicity this refers to all forms of higher business education where the output – not exclusively but primarily – is the replacement of medium level managers of the company sector.

As a rule the problem is raised in a very simplified form as follows: what conflicts may arise from the fact that *the attitude to management training in lead countries is practice-oriented, whereas in the follower countries after a thorough theoretical introduction practicality does not reach the desired level?* The authors of this paper have felt the internationalisation of management training in their own teaching practice for almost 15 years and find that the above problem – despite its element of truth – partly serves the purpose to justify the spreading of know-how of western management training.

Traditions of Hungarian management training are not too long and throughout 40 years it was not market economy that formed the centrally planned economic environment in which it was done. No independent schools of management and marketing or methodological workshops were established but rather a Prussian-like – Russian-like – adaptation of the theoretical and practical teaching of advanced western countries took place instead. The situation changed only owing to the radical transformations in the 1990s. The sometimes unusual methodology of the appearing American and western European business schools enforced the changes in teaching technology and methodology.

### **WHAT DO GRANTORS OF WESTERN TEACHING KNOW-HOW EXPECT FROM FOLLOWER COUNTRIES?**

Undoubtedly a more and more urgent task is to bridge the gap between the extraordinarily quickly changing business environment and the developing management training, which nevertheless appears to be falling behind. Here the stake is the following: *how much is management training able or unable to continuously meet the requirements of the business sphere?* And hopefully avoiding an educational crisis (Bottery 1999). Fortunately (?) the higher business education of more advanced countries is also at a loss to answer certain questions. Namely because the conventional curriculum structure in management training is less and less able to respond to the challenges of the new environment. Regarding students as customers of teaching service we must suppose that customers expect to attain the best possible competitive position in the labour market.

In today’s corporate practice a functional approach is more and more substituted by integrated, interfunctional team work. Problems in managers’ decision-making cannot be understood through the narrow lenses of particular functions (i.e. subject groups). Conventional subject structures do not take these into consideration at all. Consequently, students today are only able to think in terms of functional “boxes”. Thus when approaching problems they try to find the answer to the question “In which subject did we learn about this?” although this is highly unusual in the practice of small enterprises. The survival of these subject boxes is unfortunately sup-

ported by the structuring of departments as well. A typical example of this can be taken from quality management. The operationalisation of the European quality model called EFQM is only possible in an interdisciplinary approach. In corporate practice this means that marketers, designers, quality managers, human resource managers etc. are only able to implement a comprehensive quality control together.

Thus managers need an extensive material of knowledge rather than traditionally deep specialization. Today we can see that manager training is not a simple development of skills but rather a development of the ability to learn new skills in the future (*life-long learning*).

In modern business life creative managers are needed instead of masters of analysis. A creative manager possesses the skill to know how to approach a business problem of any kind, he or she is self-confident in recognizing the problem and can communicate persuasively both orally and in writing. Analysis is the responsibility of the executive level; the management “only” has to be able to judge whether the documents for decision-making and analysis preparation are reliable or not. But the leaders of micro and small enterprises cannot do without an analytical thinking either. Therefore, both groups have to be taught even though their expectations are totally different from one another.

The method of learning should be solving realistic problems. Instead of a traditionally passive, unrealistic teaching the principle of “learning by doing” should dominate. An outstanding example of this is the teaching methodology of a *problem based learning* (PBL) system. Here – discarding the fixed, low-efficiency-level technique of “the teacher giving a lecture to the sleeping audience and then they learn the methods in practice in lessons” – processing certain interdisciplinary subject groups starts by assigning the tasks, it continues with the students’ attempts to solve the problem and finishes in a lecture by drawing conclusions. As it is done in practice too. Only within the modest limits of the students’ practical experiences.

We must take notice of the fact that we are working in a client driven environment. We must devise a new testing system that indeed measures problem-solving skills. This might be the greatest challenge of mass education. The conventional testing system (which apart from a single thesis paper only measures students’ knowledge in one discipline at a time) ignores the fact that people with different qualities can equally be successful.

A well-known solution in the EU is for instance integrated i.e. co-animated teamwork. For example in an interdepartmental cooperation in the subject called *Corporate policy*, decision-making situations modelled in an interdisciplinary approach are practiced in the form of managerial role-plays. The model of open education = business relations and activity is also like this. The openness of this kind of education is ensured by in-house training at companies, inviting respected and acknowledged experts as corporate lecturers, students’ opportunities for gaining work experience and by establishing student enterprises. Based on the concept of life long learning, the traditional higher educational training for obtaining the first academic degree becomes simplified and the emphasis shifts to continuous training during career advancement. Training programmes cannot be project-like target tasks. Part-time students are becoming the main target group. The pillars of the new management training can be illustrated with the model on *Figure 1*.

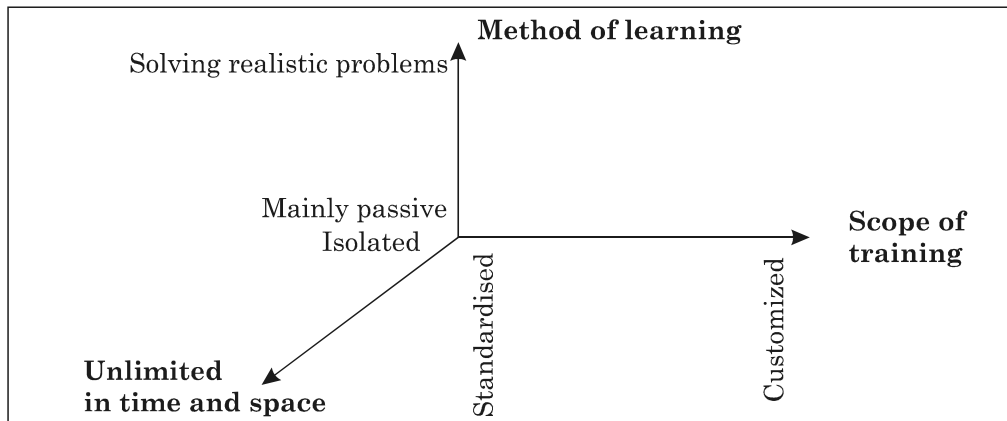


Figure 1  
The pillars of the new management training

For the management of education in new member countries the situation is even more critical. It is sufficient to think of the double pressure on core functions (learning, teaching, socialisation) in one hand and on second order changes (policy, supporting infrastructure) in the other hand (LEITHWOOD et al. 1999).

#### ABOUT INTERCULTURAL ADAPTATION

In addition to the above expectations of western management training we are also faced with those difficulties that are the requirements of the internationalising educational environment. Business schools could best rise to the global challenge if they themselves could become globalised. Business education is becoming a “knowledge networker”. The students expect to acquire the skills to work in multi-cultural teams with all-round education in different countries. Therefore, it would be most expedient for them to become part of an international network during their studies. Contrary to this – and especially in management training schools of less advanced countries – they manage to reach the level of limited internationalisation.

In the figure we can see that on one of the axes the international market of education develops towards training that is unlimited in time and space. For instance external control of testing (even abroad) and a web-based distance education serve this purpose including those educational programmes in which students can learn on several, different locations.

The linear approach according to which practice is understood through theory is more typical of the education in follower (that is to say teaching technology grantee) countries than of the education of advanced countries. One of the major obstacles of practice-oriented teaching is that it requires teachers with practical experience. The type of career in which teachers from business life gradually join educational institutions – as is a usual case in western countries – is now becoming to appear in follower regions as well. Today such a change in career still equals failure.

Based on many years’ observation of the authors, we need to add a frequently underestimated problem to the above. We must be aware that there are *different*

*problem-solving cultures* living side by side in particular nations and their surroundings. Such schools are for instance

- the Anglo-Saxon,
- the French,
- the German,
- the Chinese schools.

With a stereotype we could say that the Anglo-Saxon problem-solving culture is simplifying and practical. It applies clear and understandable models to identify problems and prefers ingenious solutions. The French gets to the “heart of the matter” from a long distance and on a long, spiral route through polemics, always stopping one step before this “heart”. In this culture an explicit formulation of the solution is regarded as restrictive. The German school sticks to the point but simultaneously systematizes in detail in its problem solving. Its analysis that precedes the solution strives to take every single aspect into consideration with no exceptions. And finally, the Chinese problem-solving culture prefers the well-trodden path, which means that if an analogous solution can be found, then it has a strong inclination for reproduction.

In order to understand the intercultural phenomena of an internationalising teaching it is important to know the underlying reasons as well. To this we can have recourse to an already classical approach of cultural anthropology. SERPELL’S *Culture’s Influence on Behaviour* from the year 1976 claims that cultural explanatory models can be used well in those areas where people need to go through a quick adaptation processes. These explanatory models also include such behavioural and cognitive processes as decision, planning and logical thinking. A common element in the tested models is that public education in childhood largely determines adult behaviour. Therefore, it would be a mistake to simplify and set the adaptability of the consumers of education, i.e. of students, identical with how they adapt themselves to the specific requirements of western educational culture.

Several experiments have justified the decisive role of the cultural environment – especially in childhood – in later problem-solving preferences. Let us call it *local determination*, which includes such factors as:

- The rules of interpersonal behaviour. This concerns the local determination of the spoken language in particular but the norms of performance in a workgroup can have important differences as well. Based on the works of ISHII and BRUNEAU, HIDASI (1999) presents an interesting feature of linguistic behaviour, namely the different role of unspoken messages. This means that silence during speech can carry entirely different meanings in different languages.
- The physical environment of learning and the accepted role of the technical background. We just have to consider that in a highly verbal educational culture excessive technical support can be a sign of weaknesses in teaching.
- Social and behavioural norms transmitted by educational institutions.
- Accepted level of performance orientation.
- The role of individuality vs. taking joint responsibilities. In this respect there is a typical difference between American and Chinese local determination.
- The role of creativity in problem solving.
- Approaching problems systematically vs. through details.

- Perception of visual representation. This, for instance, is a dimension that is imprinted in childhood strongly and its cultural differences are significant.

## CONSEQUENCES

We have seen the intercultural determination in the spread of western technologies of manager training. The consequences can be observed in how case studies are worked on. Depending on which culture the student (or the teacher!) adheres to, the “solution or solutions?” dilemma may give rise to uncertainties. In the German and Chinese approaches we look for the answer to the question “What is the solution?” whereas the Anglo-Saxon but particularly the French culture searches for the “solution” in alternatives. This problem most acutely occurs when teaching multicultural groups. Nevertheless, in the European Union and in the unified credit system and the higher business education in a foreign language it is simply inevitable or rather advisable to host foreign students. A determining factor of the foreign image of the hosting institution will be how such expected methodological conflicts are solved.

Obviously, the less experience a student has of other teaching cultures, the stronger he or she will be affected by local determination. For example it is a well-known phenomenon that those Chinese students who study abroad (too) for a longer period of time have a higher capability of self-adaptation than their fellow-students who acquired their skills in a domestic environment “only”. Yet it still remains a crucial question whether it is management training according to western standards that results in the best output. Is this really the most effective solution? Logically, for the grantor of teaching technologies this is the most convenient one. However, if we think back to what we learnt from those theories of technology transfer that were inspired by western models, the contradiction becomes apparent immediately. Technology transfer is most efficient when it is a *mutual learning process*. So it seems that in the spread of teaching technologies beside global cost efficiency the importance of local adaptation gets lost.

The expectations of Hungarian students only make the Anglo-Saxon model, i.e. a teaching methodology that gives unambiguous answers, marketable. At the same time and due to the previous Prussian-like school system, thorough analyses are also popular, just like a synthesis of the two models, arriving at “black and white” solutions. Very often students prefer such alternative solutions that are unusual in a normal market economy and would never occur to students of advanced western countries. The high inclination of Hungarian students towards individualism also causes severe problems thus in teamwork they wish to do everything by themselves or, if their dominance cannot be exerted, they do nothing at all.

Globalisation in education is heading in two directions. On the one hand it is a positive process as it makes the worldwide spread of knowledge related to management training and science possible, on the other hand it might seem as if the standardization of methods and knowledge endangered the unfolding of creativity. Although Hungarian education has already clearly shifted towards the Anglo-Saxon teaching systems, it still attempts to preserve this local creativity since despite its greater integration with world economy a great share of Hungary’s economy is made up of local small and medium-sized enterprises, which in spite of fierce globalisation are forced to preserve their markets by using modern managerial solutions.

The starting point in teaching students from different cultures should be what methodological approach would result in the most efficient development of their skills. Consequently, sometimes teaching culturally homogeneous (that is to say unmixed) groups can lead to better results than insisting on multicultural teamwork. Among others Dutch and Estonian examples illustrate that a culture-specific treatment of students is indeed a successful method, which also enhances their satisfaction.

Instead of putting forward complete solutions, this paper voiced those doubts that have accumulated in us during our many years' international teaching practice. However, we think that it is important that in this internationalising market of education not only economic efficiency but also the preservation of local values become key aspects. Especially in that case when this latter proves to be a better solution from the point of view of medium term results.

### **CONCLUSIONS AND POSSIBLE RESEARCH TOPICS**

What could be our conclusion? Upon the above detailed we can state that the management training – in its way towards globalisation – faces two basic dilemmas. One is the question whether the curricula really meet the market requirements. The dilemma here stands in the ever increasing gap between student's market (i.e. the input of the management training) and the human resource market. The phenomenon is well known in the developed countries and it is resulting in such a money-wasting training structure that cannot be financed for long term even in welfare states. A warning sign should be that certain firms take into account the reputation of training institutions merely as a filter criterion. They are organizing for example case study competitions so that they can directly observe problem solving skills of the potential employees. This problem would merit at least a focus group discussion between educators, students and HR-managers.

The other dilemma is the interactive way of development by cultural exchange, i.e. what should take over (e.g. the practice orientation) and what should preserve. The training traditions can be determined locally with such a force that holds values and archaism at the same time. As if the educational reform-zeal of the last years in the European follower region threw out the baby together with the bath water.

If we try to define some possible research topics that could be worthwhile investigating in the future the following problem areas could be mentioned. These all are in connection with local determination of intercultural conflicts:

- interpersonal behaviour;
- technical support versus verbality;
- performance orientation;
- problem-approaching style.

Concerning the proposed research design we think that a four stages methodology could be the best approach to the research problem. In the first and second stages in-depth interviews and focus-group discussions with students from different cultures are proposed. This research phase could provide us with the necessary information for the finetuning of the next stages. In these latter class-room observations and situation oriented experimental research would deliver interesting results. To assure the comparability of the observations and the experiments well worked-

out guidelines (scenarios) are needed. And finally the interpretation would serve to better understand the intercultural conflicts in the international management training and to find the reasonable balance between standardization and adaptation of teaching methodology.

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