

Worlds of Management. Transregional Approaches to Management Knowledge since 1945

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The history of management has traditionally been told with a sole focus on capitalism and its most emblematic organisational form: the company.¹ Recent scholarship, however, has advocated for broadening the take on management to explicitly examine managing techniques in non-capitalist economic systems and societal spheres beyond the enterprise.² For the Worlds of Management conference, a set of notable contributions explored this approach empirically. The fifteen papers presented a truly international panorama, bringing together case studies from countries of the former Soviet Bloc, Southeast Asia, and capitalist economies such as the United States.^[3] Framing the history of management as a „history of economic knowledge and practices,“ the following questions guided the highly engaging three days: What exactly can historians understand by management knowledge and practices? How to determine and classify differences between management knowledge in the business and the state sphere? How does management knowledge circulate across national and regional borders?

The opening panel centred on the adaptation of management education across economic systems. MARA MARGINEAN (Cluj-Napoca) showed that UN training programmes on labour management and social change enabled the 1970s Romanian technocracy to gradually move away from Soviet models and establish closer ties with Western actors. In contrast, LOURENS VAN HAAFTEN (Leuven) elucidated how 1960s Indian elites used the transfer of US American management education to build the Indian

nation on socialist principles. Methodologically, the papers' focus on education elicited the question of how historians can write the history of managerialism beyond the classroom. Moreover, the group critically discussed the conference's leitmotif of management as knowledge and practices: Where could the notions of techniques and technologies fit in? Moreover, if historians of management focus on sets of knowledge, where to draw the boundaries in terms of disciplines?

Open to the public, the keynote by EGLĖ RINDZEVIČIŪTĖ (London) attracted around 100 participants, demonstrating one of the advantages of digital academic gatherings. Counting among the leading advocates for transregional historiography of management, Rindzevičiūtė called for a „revisionist history of management.“ Rather than constituting two fundamentally different spheres, Soviet and US governmental elites from the 1960s to the 1980s embraced the same scientific methods of governance. Umbrella terms such as cybernetics, systems analysis, and policy sciences, the speaker showed, emerged from the joint efforts of Eastern and Western scientists to develop techniques of control already from the 1950s onwards. The ensuing discussion unearthed the particular importance of language in devising and pursuing transnational research approaches. Thus, Rindzevičiūtė confirmed that her broad understanding of management partly had etymological roots: The Lithuanian equivalent of the term management (*vadyba*) is associated with the notion of leadership, the Rus-

¹ Alfred D. Chandler, *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business*, Cambridge, Mass., London 1977; Luc Boltanski/Ève Chiapello, *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme*, Paris 1999.

² Eglė Rindzevičiūtė, *The future as an intellectual technology in the Soviet Union: from centralised planning to reflexive management/Le futur en tant que technologie intellectuelle en Union soviétique: de la planification centralisée au management réflexif*, in: *Cahiers du monde Russe*, 2015, 56 (1), pp. 113–134; Sandrine Kott, *The social engineering project: Exportation of capitalist management culture to Eastern Europe (1950–1980)*, in: *Planning in Cold War Europe: Competition, cooperation, circulations (1950s–1970s)*, ed. by Michel Christian, Ondrej Matejka and Sandrine Kott, München/Wien 2018, pp. 123–141; Vítězslav Sommer, *Managing socialist industrialism: Czechoslovak management studies in the 1960s and 1970s*, in: *ibid.*, pp. 237–259.

sian term *upravlenie* refers both to management and governance. Hence, the first day ended with an apt illustration of the variety of cultural connotations the concept of management entails.

MALAK LABIB (Cairo) opened the following day and expounded on the joint efforts of US-Western consultants and Egyptian technocrats in promoting new models of efficiency on the Egyptian shop floor and public sector from 1945 to 1968. KENA WANI (Durham) retraced how in India of the 1950s/60s, the newly established discipline of management studies served to assess developmental goals as well as the consolidation process of the recent postcolonial state. Like the previous panel, both talks revealed a social constructivist view on knowledge and practices, emphasising the dynamics of framing and interpretative flexibility. Besides reflecting on whether the tweaking of ideas according to interests and ideologies was specific to the field of management, the discussion also touched upon the role of numbers and measures in management discourses and questioned whether numbers allowed for a similar range of interpretative flexibility.

Taking up one of the conference's central puzzles, two panels on management and planning followed. MARTIN GORSKY (London) traced the WHO's thinking in terms of „health systems“ back to the notion of „health planning“ starting in the 1950s and pointed out how this seemingly neutral discursive motive helped negotiate the value-laden field of health care even in times of Cold War. ZOÉ EVRARD (Paris) explained how in 1980s Belgium, the planning model in public policy was reconfigured rather than abandoned: from Keynesianism and formal planning to „neoliberal informal planning.“ Both papers provided the opportunity to discuss the character of and relation among different economic paradigms: Could capitalism be discussed in a more nuanced way by differentiating Keynesianism and neoliberalism? Participants also inquired about actor roles and professions: If there were managers and statisticians in international organisations, why were there no „planners“?

ROMAN ABRAMOV (Moscow) and YI LU (Cambridge/MA) followed up on

these issues from two other globally situated viewpoints. Abramov presented his interview-based study on how Soviet engineers and heads of design bureaus adapted US-American project management tools, driven by the military-technical competition entailed by the Cold War. Yi focused on the role of paper in bureaucracy, showing that producing essentially purposeless „paper gluts“ was meant to demonstrate administrators' hard work in Maoist China. The ensuing discussion addressed several methodological considerations regarding both panels. Participants likened management knowledge to the infamous „black box“ so typical of any history of knowledge and technology: hard to access for historians without the insider's perspective. In this context, the pitfalls of interviewing were highlighted, as routine actions seem elusive and not worth mentioning to contemporaries and may not be accounted for in interviews. At the same time, Yi's paper, in particular, offered insights into grassroots historiography, with the author having gathered many of his sources by private collectors or on markets.

The last day opened with a panel focusing on management in the enterprise beyond the capitalist system. IULIA PAPUSCHINA (Perm) introduced her study on the (semi-)informal managerial practices that Soviet fashion design organisations used to deal with resource limitations in the planned economy. In a similar vein, MACIEJ TYMIŃSKI (Warsaw) elucidated the spectrum of formal and informal instruments applied by Polish company managers from the 1960s to the 1980s, conceiving them as „contractors“ in the „command economy.“ DHIRAJ KUMAR NITE (New Delhi) showed how campaigns on workplace safety and theories on scientific management informed management approaches in Indian coal businesses. The discussion now explicitly took up what had already been alluded to in previous sessions: the gender dimension. While in 1960s Poland, just as in the West, few women could be found in management positions, Indian coal enterprises ran as family businesses. In the USSR fashion industry, female designers were sufficiently empowered to confront male bureaucrats in public administration with their de-

mands. Participants encouraged the group to take the variety of gender norms displayed in the cases as an invitation also to question notions of masculinity in managers' self-perception.

The last panel opened new trajectories in terms of concepts and sources. PAUL DRAGOȘ ALIGICĂ and SIMONA PREDA (both Bucarest) used the notions of propaganda and ideology to analyse the functions of managerial and work discourses in Romanian Socialism. Dragoș emphasised the difference between economic and managerial thought on a conceptual plane: While historiography has produced an extensive scholarship on the former, it has barely paid attention to the latter, making the conference a timely intervention. NATAŠA SIMEUNOVIĆ BAJIĆ (Niš), in turn, retraced the changing visual representation of „the manager“ in the (post-) Yugoslav context: from the socialist, disorganised and powerless manager to the post-socialist, corrupt and reckless manager. Here, the group discussed the importance of critically considering genre rules when analysing visual sources.

VERENA HALSMAYER (Lucerne) rounded up the conference with a concise and analytical concluding statement. Engaging with the notion of practice, she framed management as being, first and foremost, an activity, that is, organising and administering. Focusing on the activity of managing would enable historians to transcend ideological divisions made in the sources – be it between capitalism and socialism or between business and state matters. Observing that every speaker had mentioned several tools and techniques of management – contracts, codes, regulations, legal texts, flow charts, industrial psychology, company/decision-making/macroeconomic models –, Halsmayer suggested complementing the history of knowledge approach to management with a history of techniques approach. Deducing a definition, she classified the practice of managing as tinkering with techniques irrespective of the process or problem at stake. In this, she echoed Wani's remarks on the first day: Management can be understood as a solution in search of a problem, be it in the public or private sphere.

The words by Anna Echthölter (Vienna), one of the session chairs, might best sum up the essence of the conference: Rather than setting out to „deconstruct Schumpeter“ and theorizing management beyond existence, all papers provided a detailed picture of how various forms of management played out on the ground. An author's workshop will follow up the highly stimulating and productive meeting at the University of Vienna in the upcoming spring; the resulting publication will constitute a valuable and hopefully widely read contribution to the emerging field of transnational management history.

Conference overview:

Panel 1: Global Circulations – Local Management

Mara Marginean (Cluj-Napoca): Global Knowledge, Local Practice: The Center for the Improvement of Industrial Managers (CEPECA) and Romania's Cooperation with the United Nations in the 1970s

Lourens van Haaften (Leuven): Management and Nation Building: The Sociotechnical Imaginaries behind the Making of the Indian Institute of Management in Ahmedabad, India

Keynote

Eglė Rindzevičiūtė (London): Thinking Management Across the Iron Curtain: Theory, Practice and Reflexivity in Soviet Management

Panel 2: Managing Development

Malak Labib (Cairo): Manufacturing Modernity on the Shop-Floor: Development Planning and Managerial Expertise in Egypt (1945–1968)

Kena Wani (Durham): Pedagogies of Development, Conceptions of Efficiency: The Industrial and Rural Analogues of Modern Managerialism in Western India, c. 1950–1979§

Panel 3: Between Management and Planning I

Martin Gorsky (London): „Planning“, „Systems Analysis“ and the Development of Health Services at the World Health Organi-

zation, c.1960–1990

Zoé Evrard (Paris): Mediating Neoliberalism within Informal Planning Governance Mechanisms. The Institutional Conversion of the Planning Bureau

Panel 4: Between Management and Planning II

Roman Abramov (Moscow): The Management of Research & Development in the Late Soviet Period: PERT System Integration and Everyday Work Practices by Soviet Engineers

Yi Lu (Cambridge/Mass.): Paper Glut: A History of Bureaucratism in Post-Revolutionary China

Panel 5: Challenges in Company Management

Iuliia Papuschina (Perm): Entrepreneurial Bricolage in Soviet Fashion Production

Maciej Tymirński (Warsaw): Managers in the Command Economy: Case Studies from Poland, 1956–1970

Dhiraj Kumar Nite (New Delhi): Managing the Mines: An Enquiry into the Safety Rationale of the Management on the Indian Coalmines 1940–1960s

Panel 6: Management Knowledge in Transformation

Paul Dragoş Aligică/Simona Preda (Bucarest): Managerial Authority in Communist Industrialization. Work and Authority in the Economic System of Communist Romania

Nataša Simeunović Bajić (Niš): The Manager as a Transitional Hero in Serbia: Visual Narratives of Managers in Yugoslav and Post-Yugoslav Context

Concluding commentary

Verena Halsmayer (Lucerne)

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