Western management training in the ‘new’ Europe 
beyond ethnocentric coherence and polycentric ambiguity

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Abstract

Since the revolutions in late 1980’s/early 1990’s in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and the former Soviet Union, a number of management education programmes have been launched by Western providers to assist with the process of economic reform and the building of new institutional frameworks. Western trainers have contrasting views as to the forms of assistance needed for post-socialist clientele. Whilst some are prepared to negotiate programme content to meet the perceived training needs of clients, others tend to draw up ‘packages of knowledge’ for exportation purposes by frequently depicting an idealised view of Western capitalist reality. The paper aims to enter the ‘mindsets’ of training providers by scrutinising the design of three examples of management training in Bulgaria and Russia over nearly a ten-year period, from 1992 until the present.

We critically examine the proposition that there has been a paradigm shift in knowledge transfer from ethnocentricity (which assumes a monopoly of appropriate knowledge and skills on the part of the trainer) to polycentricity (which vests primary responsibility for learning and training with indigenous providers and audiences). In drawing upon these concepts, which were originally conceived by Perlmutter (1969) to explain the phases of growth of multinational corporations, we seek to explore the process of the ‘international travel of ideas’ from West to East. We assert that moves towards ‘empowerment’ to locals in the field of international training and development are marked by ambiguity, and in fact may only signify only modest divestment of critical areas of responsibility for the formulation and delivery of ‘assistance’ programmes from Western agencies. Indeed our findings point to the somewhat disconcerting conclusion that a ‘survival of the fittest’ mentality pervades the design of newer training initiatives with clients being selected for inclusion in programmes on the basis of economic potential and ideological consonance with Western versions of capitalism.

Introduction

Promoting sustainable development in the Former Soviet Union (FSU) and Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) goes hand in hand with growing and multiplying managerial skills. The lack of such skills undermines the development of both public and private enterprises and is a serious impediment to increased and well functioning foreign direct investment (FDI). Since the revolutions in the late 1980s/early 1990s in CEE, a number of assistance programmes, in the broad field of ‘management education’, have been launched by Western providers. These aim to assist with the process of economic reform and the building of new institutional frameworks. Our study takes a retrospective view of examples of such training initiatives over the last decade. In seeking to comprehend the purpose and organisation of cross cultural training we will draw upon the conceptual framework originally established by Perlmutter in 1969 to explain the stages of evolution of multinational corporations. We argue that the theoretical insights provided by Perlmutter have explanatory value in the analysis of training provision from West to East for two major reasons. Firstly, the paradigm centres upon the flow of people, policies, ideas and information from a ‘parent’ holding organisation to a ‘dependent’ subsidiary. By implication, the inter-relationship between parent and dependent is one based upon relative power, a factor that has resonance for Western trainers in the post-socialist countries. Secondly, Perlmutter’s typologies account for changes in the
relationship between parent and subsidiary over time, ostensibly reflecting moves towards the empowerment of subsidiaries on an incremental basis. Investigation of phases of international training programmes in CEE also points to a process of divesting authority to indigenous providers. Circumscribing such factors, the notion of culture is vital in comprehending the complex and ambiguous relations between actors in countries of origin and those in host countries. The possibility of cultural dissonance seems to increase as foreign subsidiaries are assimilated into trans-global organisational structures, a factor which undoubtedly is paralleled in West-East training initiatives.

Nevertheless, we would stress that we are using Perlmutter’s framework primarily for the purpose of analogy. We identify two factors that limit the applicability of the stereotypes of multinational development in a precise analytical fashion to the field of international training. Firstly, it may be argued that the relationship between the Western training provider and East European recipient is transient in nature. In contrast to work relations in more formal organisational structures, training provider and recipient are not typically viewed as co-existing within a single organisational entity. Secondly, turning to organisational purpose, the multinational corporation, as the archetypal exponent of western capitalism, establishes this distinctive organisational form in direct pursuit of its quest for profitability and global competitive advantage. On the other hand, the terms of reference of international training initiatives tend to justify their existence in more idealistic and developmental terms, such as the pursuit of “knowledge transfer” or the lending of “assistance”. We shall return to these themes. In the next section we outline the major features of ethnocentric, polycentric and geocentric typologies as defined by Perlmutter.

**Ethnocentricity**

The ethnocentric perspective represents a ‘foster-parent/child’ (signalling distance and familiarity) view of home/host relationships, and is characterised by low levels of trust. The assumption is made that home country nationals possess a monopoly of appropriate knowledge and skills hence the emphasis placed on expatriation. Nevertheless, if a strategy of ethnocentricity is to be viable there is generally a requirement that staff transferred to the host country possess ‘cultural sensitivity’ and language proficiency. The assumptions of ethnocentricity can be summarized as following (adapted from Maddox,1993):

- What works at home will work abroad
- Emphasis on conformity with centrally determined plans
- Staffing through expatriation
- Unfamiliarity and lack of knowledge about foreign environments
- Environmental differences not recognised
- Assumption that western inspired change can be easily accomplished
- Success of change viewed through a western ‘lens’

**Polycentricity**

The polycentric perspective reflects an acknowledgement on the part of the holding company that subsidiaries are moving towards maturity, and therefore they are permitted to exercise discretion in certain areas of decision making. It should be noted that core strategic and functional capacities remain in head quarters (for example research and development and financial investment). Indeed, the decision to decentralise may be regarded as making overall strategic ‘sense’ as the reservoir of local knowledge and skills is drawn upon to engender
responsiveness to local conditions as appropriate. Consequently, decisions in HRM may be passed down to operational levels to comply with local employment norms, or products customised locally to meet distinctive market conditions. In practice it has been demonstrated (Scullion, 1994) that corporate boards of multinationals are most prepared to divest decision-making authority to local managers when the latter are deemed competent and trustworthy. It is therefore the case that a single corporation may demonstrate degrees of polycentricity, depending upon the perceived status of subsidiaries. Polycentric assumptions and attitudes imply that:

- Each environment is unique
- Diversity and subculture are encouraged
- Movement towards foreign units assumes responsibility for their own behaviour
- Empowerment of local units may promote cultural ambiguity and complexity

**Geocentricity**

Geocentricity compromises between the two previous categories. The predominant viewpoint is non-national or internationalist. It assumes cultural homogeneity and mobility of actors between nation states. In a geocentric framework, cultural and structural dimensions balance integration and differentiation. The geocentric position (which may be viewed as the most idealised typology) depicts a position in which HQ and subsidiaries are regarded as ‘partners’. Combining the facets of integration and differentiation, there is an attempt to harness cultural diversity for positive effect and to neutralise indigenous problems of culture.

As a general observation on Perlmutter’s paradigm, we would note that it is tempting both to attach value judgements to each typology, and to conceive of it as a blueprint to guide multinational development in an overtly deterministic fashion. We would take issue with both of these premises. Firstly, it would be oversimplifying reality to suggest that ethnocentricity is bad, and polycentricity is good. Indeed host country nationals may tolerate the unambiguous machinations of ethnocentricism, whilst suspecting the illusory nature of delegated decision making. Second, geocentricity is not, in reality, an inevitable ‘end point’ of multinational development. One can conceive of examples in which the various multinational conditions co-exist, or indeed of a developmental trajectory that represents a reverse movement along the assumed ‘axis’.

**Three cases**

**Bulgaria Train 1 (BT1), 1992 - 1996**

Bulgaria Train was a project sponsored by PHARE and delivered in a number of major Bulgarian cities. It initially operated from 1992-1994, and was led by a consortium of educational institutions from five west European countries. In 1994, the consortium was enlarged with two schools from two other western countries as new members. The schools delivered training courses mainly in the form of classroom training. A variety of courses were delivered in Strategic Marketing Planning, Business Strategy, Corporate Finance, Accounting Principles, Quality and Technology Management, Organisational Design and Development, Human Resource Management and Change Management. The target groups were state-owned enterprises undergoing restructuring, small and medium enterprises of all kinds, ministries and central and local government agencies, and municipalities involved in the
privatisation process. The participants were managers of varying status working in different sectors of the economy.

**Bulgaria Train 2 (BT 2), 2000**
Bulgaria Train 2 is an ongoing project financed by PHARE which started officially in autumn 2000. It has two main components: a) enterprise-based management development and organizational change and b) management training and consulting services for Bulgarian business. The first component aims to improve management practices that currently prevail in Bulgarian companies. The purpose of the second component is upgrading the country’s business training and consulting sector. The Western members of the consortium conducting this project were part of the consortium in Bulgaria Train 1. The local branch of a large international consultancy company is a part of the consortium along with three Western academic institutions. Additionally, both the institution leading the consortium and the person in charge of the whole training program are the same as in the period 1992-1996. The training approach though differs dramatically: whereas Bulgaria Train 1 relied on class-room teaching activities, Bulgaria Train 2 is focused on problem centred actions in Bulgarian companies. The Western experts are expected to solve concrete problems jointly with Bulgarian managers out in the field.

**Russia Train (RT), 1996 - 2000**
Russia Train was oriented towards senior and potential managers from western oriented Russian and Baltic companies as well as from suppliers and customers to these companies. The program took place from the beginning of 1996 to 2000 and was financed by the governments of four western countries and seven large multinational corporations from these countries. The aim was to provide participants with a “tool box” of suitable management methods, processes and guidelines and to foster useful business contacts between Russian and western managers and within the cohort of Russian managers. The training consisted of three modules: a) three weeks classroom based activity (1+1+1); b) individual training with a western mentor including an internship period in the west and c) an in-company change management project. Seminar based teaching included themes from microeconomics, corporate strategy, marketing, management accounting, organisational behaviour and HRM, finance, business evaluation and internationalisation. Teaching was mainly delivered by faculty members from three (initially four) western business schools although they were supported, in specialist areas by senior managers from western consortium companies. Subsequently, around 200 mentors of the western companies implemented the mentor training programme, tailored to meet the mutual business needs and options of companies, participant and mentor. In total 18 course programs have been completed of which three were exclusive to the Baltic States. Around 400 managers have progressed through the programme. Many of them joined the Russia Train Alumni Club.

**Methodology**
In this paper we favour a longitudinal perspective. Our three cases cover a period of 10 years and this allows us to follow the evolvement of tendencies and processes in Western training interventions in the eastern part of Europe. BT1 and BT2 can be approached as two parts of the same case – many factors are kept constant which allows us to follow the development in this training intervention. In this sense we have a case that lasted for 9 years and is ongoing at present. The Russian case presents to high extent the state of the art. Additionally, the first
written documents regarding the intentions with RT, its design and the main actors, are from 1994 which implies that we have a case that lasted for 7 years.

The fact that BT1 and RT are completed and BT2 has just started gives us the opportunity to have the retrospective analysis and reflection perspective on one hand and observe and analyse processes and phenomena as they evolve here and now on the other. These two angles continuously influence each other.

The data we have used for writing this paper are of two different kinds. The first important source is the volume of documentation and other written materials to which we have access. These include Terms of References, applications, descriptions of a large number of training modules, reports, evaluations, letters, e-mail messages, minutes of meetings, etc. from all three cases. We treat these documents as data in their own right, as “social facts” in that they are produced, shared and used in socially organized ways and at the same time we respect the fact that they are not transparent representations of the processes they relate to (Atkinson & Coffey, 1997).

Our other relevant source is first hand experiences since one of us has been / is heavily involved in the three training programs (we provide the reader with more details later in this section). These two clusters of data sources provided different accounts of the same processes and situations. As suggested by Hammersley & Atkinson (1983), we have related the different kinds of data in such a way as to counteract various possible threats to the validity of our analysis. We claim by no means that this increases the “objectivity” of the picture we draw. Our priority is to understand the studied phenomena in their contextual concreteness; our concern is the depth of the analysis and not at all pursuing “objective” truth.

Hofstede (1993: 82) argues that “management scientists, theorists, and writers are human too: they grew up in a particular society in a particular period, and their ideas cannot but reflect the constraints of their environment”. According to him, theories, models, and practices are developed in particular countries and are infused with the distinctive characteristics of that culture. Boyacigiller and Adler (1991) point out that one of the researchers’ responsibilities is to specify clearly the cultural boundaries of their work.

We personally find important the act of self-reflecting and writing explicitly about who we are. “There seem to be growing pressures on theorists to prolong and deepen the moments of reflexivity so that they will then see just how situated and constructed their universals are and how few voices their situated assertions incorporate. In Thorngate’s language, there is pressure to move toward greater accuracy in explanations, but it is directed at the explainer rather than the objects being explained” (Weick, 1999: 802). We find discounting the uniqueness of our own subjectivity impossible or at least highly inappropriate. The following lines give the reader some details of our own background which are relevant in the context of this paper.

One of us is British who takes a critical view of Western management orthodoxy, the other one is a Bulgarian who has lived and worked in different Western countries for the last 9 years and who feels at home neither place.

In writing this paper we rely heavily on participant observation data especially from RT and BT2. Besides having done some work in BT1, one of us has been actively involved from the very beginning to the very end of Russia Train, initially as a lecturer and later as a training director. She is one of the key actors in Bulgaria Train 2. She maintains all the time a kind of a “dual citizenship” (Schwandt, 1997: 111): a) acting in the training programs as “expert”, “lecturer”, “program director”, just to mention a few roles assigned by these projects, and b) more importantly (to herself) being a researcher interested in knowledge diffusion across cultures and playing the role of a “complete participant” as one possible dimension of participant observation (Gill & Johnson, 1997). She represents a Western academic institution on the one hand and has strong informal contacts with the locals who have been
involved in the three training programs in Bulgaria and Russia. Having insights as a complete participant (the researcher takes part in the activity and her research identity is concealed) brings an additional relevant perspective to all the written data we are working with. We both are interested in the human side of organizations, although from different theoretical perspectives. We notice and emphasise different aspects of the same fact and this enriches our understandings and analyses. Working as a team allowed “investigator triangulation” (Fielding & Fielding, 1986) and invited both for mutual criticism and validation of viewpoints and interpretations.

There are certain limitations in our study. The choice of three cases limits the representativeness of our study in the sense that it does not allow us to embrace automatically a larger population for which the conclusions are valid. However, qualitative sampling promotes the quality of data as the major concern and relegates representativeness to secondary importance (Gummesson, 1991). We conduct “analytic generalizations”, not “statistical” ones (Yin, 1994); in epistemological terms we opt for “logical inference” rather than for “statistical inference” (Smith, 1991).

Applying the typologies to training interventions in Russia and Eastern Europe

Ethnocentricity is underpinned by a universalist approach, in that programme organisation, programme content and delivery methods in one culture are believed to be appropriate and equally applicable in others. And even when Western organizers and trainers try to localise and customise training programs, they clearly assume a common reference point—namely, theirs. In such a framework, diversity and distinctiveness are filtered out. A large number of management training programmes taking place in Russia and EE have been / are funded and delivered from the West, and as such they reflect the ideological predisposition of funding agencies about the transformation process itself. PHARE, for example, is engaged in a broad programme of economic reform and institution building in CEE, and as such seeks to develop the integrity and competence of social actors through the assistance it sponsors. On the other hand, private concerns (e.g. multinational corporations and management consultancies) are likely to proselytise market values within the new managerial cadre, seeking to engender entrepreneurial attributes and to enhance security for foreign direct investment (FDI).

Whereas ethnocentricity is focused on unity and coherence, polycentricity implies ambiguity and multiplicity in designing and delivering training in the Eastern part of Europe. Over the last few years, not only the ‘winners’ of (often lucrative) training tenders were selected after consulting local stakeholders, but also indigenous trainers became more and more partners in their delivery. Programme organisation starts occurring on a more decentralised basis and the emergence of designated ‘centres of excellence’ could be expected in the near future. Indigenous actors are involved in negotiating the design of programmes and in defining their terms of reference. The skills and capacities of clientele are recognised and developed in a continuous fashion. Materials are designed to account for local political, economic, technological and cultural specificities. Nevertheless, despite customisation of programme content and delivery techniques to fit with local circumstances, elements of Western control over programme design still remain. This promotes ambiguity and inconsistency in cultural messages from the perspective of the learner.

Table 1 identifies features of ethnocentric and polycentric orientation in cross-border training programs drawing on examples from our three case studies. The dichotomy ethnocentricity–polycentricity presents a simplistic framework not able to cover the richness of variables of social interaction. Following Collins (1986: 520), dichotomous oppositional differences invariably imply relationships of superiority and inferiority, hierarchical relationships that
mesh with political economies of domination and subordination”. Although neither ethnocentricity nor polycentricity are absolute and cannot be fully represented in management training programs, their fiction is an important dimension in the process of designing and conducting these programs.

Table 1: Exemplifying ethnocentric and polycentric approaches on the basis of the 3 case training programmes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Members of consortium</th>
<th>Ethnocentricity</th>
<th>Polycentricity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Western business schools (BT1)</td>
<td>Western business schools and international management consultancy based in Bulgaria (BT2)</td>
<td>Intensified cooperation between the Western consortium and a local business school with the intention of Russians taking over the project completely (late RT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western multinational corporations and business schools (early RT)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Features of programme design</td>
<td>Programme designed exclusively by Western consortia comprising representatives from leading business schools (B 1, RT)</td>
<td>Programme designed by Western consortia comprising representatives from leading business schools in cooperation with local experts (B 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective of the training programme</td>
<td>“Provide western managerial know-how to BG managers in companies under the Ministry of Industry in the privatisation stage” (BT1)</td>
<td>“To analyse and apply international business theories and practices; to discuss how different factors affect business efficiency; to develop business contacts; to increase business between Russia and participating Western countries” (RT, 2000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisations’ selection</td>
<td>Wide-ranging representation including companies, ministries, and municipalities; private and state-owned sector; no specific requirements regarding the company’s financial condition and future prospects (BT1)</td>
<td>Solely corporate representation selected on the basis of criteria incl. current financial condition, prospects, strengths and opportunities, calibre of company management, risks associated with the company (BT2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual participants’ selection</td>
<td>No limitations regarding participants’ age; no knowledge of English required; no testing of relevance of management experience (BT1)</td>
<td>Age is highly significant, exclusion of people above age of 45; knowledge of English is essential; formal evaluation of managerial competence and potential (BT2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trainers</td>
<td>Exclusively Western (BT1, early RT)</td>
<td>Main deliverers are Bulgarians; Westerners acting as mentors and facilitators (B 2, late RT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>Curriculum based on a wide range of Western undergraduate business disciplines (BT1)</td>
<td>Indicative topic areas subsequently related to clients’ specific problems (BT2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivery methods</td>
<td>Class-room teaching in episodic 3-4 day courses (BT1)</td>
<td>Consultancy based; Western experts placed in the field; study tours in the West (BT2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Internships for participants outside Russia and company based change projects (RT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>All sessions conducted through translator (BT1)</td>
<td>The programme is conducted in English (BT2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sessions conducted through simultaneous translation (early RT)</td>
<td>Simultaneous translation of English language sessions; increasing number of sessions delivered by Russians in Russian (late RT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-programme activity</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Active Alumni Club</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Changing emphases in training interventions into Russia and Eastern Europe

Table 1 delineates changing features in the design and delivery of our case training programmes over their period of operation. The dimensions we have selected to chart such developments take into account ‘stakeholder’ positions in formulating the nature of programmes, specific features of programme content, and techniques used to facilitate the diffusing of knowledge. The chart indicates that qualitative changes have indeed occurred in the strategic intent and underlying philosophy of these programmes. It is pertinent to identify major themes that point in the direction of a move from ethnocentric to polycentric orientation of training programmes.

Firstly, there has been a clear move towards increasing involvement of local actors in programme design and delivery. For example, consortium membership was extended in BT2 to include a Sofia based management consultancy, this providing scope for the expression of Bulgarian ‘voice’ in both establishing the direction of the project and in adjudicating its progress. Turning to operational matters, the respective roles of visiting and indigenous trainers were revised (for BT2 and RT) to ensure prominence for the latter.

Secondly, there has been a move on the part of western providers to recognise the needs of CEE audiences in a discriminating and differentiated fashion. For both BT2 and RT teaching and learning philosophy departs from previous traditions in this area by identifying distinct project groupings within training audiences, and incepting an educational agenda based on expert responses to questions posed by clients. In a broad sense, a move has been espoused from the ‘transmission-belt’ of knowledge from the West, towards flexible and negotiated responses to problems. As a corollary to this, considerable rigour is now exercised (BT2 and RT), in selecting suitable clients for training. Not only will represented organisations need to demonstrate a capacity to compete within the new economic order, but also, in a climate of self-selection, individual clients will have their ‘capitalist’ credentials marked by age and language proficiency.

Thirdly, returning to the concept of knowledge creation and diffusion, there is an assumption in the programmes that appropriate knowledge will be internationalised. This is encouraged through internships in foreign companies (RT) and field tours in the West (BT2). Moreover, the intention to sustain networks of all programme participants in the future (for example the RT alumnus) signals the creation of a ‘knowledge nexus’ in which knowledge can flow in a multidirectional fashion, regardless of participant nationality or status.

Beyond ethnocentricity?

Returning to our ‘global’ analogy which associates the stages of multinational development with phases in international training delivery from the ‘West’ to the ‘East’, how can we make sense of these trends we have identified?

Why involve locals?

The mantra “think globally - act locally” now permeates the mindset of many an international executive. According to a number of theorists (for example Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1989; Martin, 1992; Prahalad & Doz, 1987; Tayeb, 1996; Terpstra & David, 1991) the balancing act to be performed by multinational corporations is to combine integration to attain organisational coherence with differentiation to ensure responsiveness to local conditions. From a strategic point of view, therefore, the continued health of the organisational ‘brain’ depends upon the finesse of movement and adaptability of the tentacles it controls. In the broader (U.S.) management literature the notion of ‘empowerment’ has found favour. It is recognised,
however, that acts of devolution associated with this concept do not constitute philanthropic
departures on the part of senior management. Rather they are important devices to bolster the
competitive position of enterprises by drawing on the know-how of those ‘close to the
customer’. Similarly, in the case of training programmes in CEE, divestment of operational
responsibility for delivery to local providers can bolster the credibility of programmes with
local audiences and attractiveness to potential participants. As the programmes we have
described are based on considerable investment (for example BT1 is financed with 1.35
million ECU and BT2 is funded to the sum of 2 million ECU) it is vital that the programmes
are perceived to be meeting ‘market’ needs both locally and internationally. Of course, a well
rehearsed critique of global capital is that important investment/strategic decisions remain
the preserve of actors in the country of origin whilst host country actors operate within
defined and restricted parameters. This phenomenon resonates in the training programmes we
have described as indigenous actors and agencies have contributed minimally to the strategic
direction of the training agenda.

*Why differentiate between training audiences?*

The move towards polycentricity on the part of multinational corporations is, in fact, seldom
as clear and unambiguous as theorists might imply. As Scullion (1994) points out, in the case
of a Food and Drinks global corporation, the preparedness of central senior management to
pass areas of strategic authority down to subsidiary management depends upon perceptions of
the competence of the latter, as well as measures of the economic viability of the operation.
Similarly, in cases where Western companies are considering entering into joint ventures
with, for example, CEE companies a battery of financial tests are likely to be applied,
accompanied by a prolonged period of ‘due diligence’. Intriguingly, the move towards
polycentricity in training provision in CEE has been associated with a stringent application of
criteria for client selection. BT2, for example, in tender documentation, advises that
participant organisations be screened according to these factors:

- The enterprise’s current financial condition
- Its main prospects and strengths and whether and how they could be converted into
opportunities
- Any corporate governance issues that might affect the success of the assignment
- Any significant risks associated with the company

As identified in Table 1, individual course participants are also now subject to a screening
process. BT2’s monthly report No 5 (May 2001) reports the decisions of a panel that has
identified suitable candidates on the basis of age (not over 44), English language proficiency
and ‘relevant’ experience.

We do not have the space to investigate this issue in depth, but would argue that the process
we have outlined sends a clear signal from ‘the West’ about the future direction of the
transformation process. Such a message is bound to cause consternation amongst those
supporting gradualist reform and preservation of a cultural ‘status quo’.

*What of knowledge transfer?*

The multinational corporation, in moving towards ‘geocentric’ or ‘global’ form offers
opportunities for rapid spread of information within (and outside) its boundaries regardless of
hierarchical or national considerations. Indeed, the exemplary status of the ‘learning
organisation’ is almost now moved beyond question. Our use of international training venture
as an analogy for multinational corporations may serve to qualify such a perception. The
establishment of ‘post programme’ networks comprising ‘West’ and ‘East’ consortia
members and participants indeed forms an infrastructure for international knowledge flow.
Nevertheless, optimism in this respect needs to be tempered by the realisation that ‘Eastern’
participants needed to demonstrate ideological consonance with liberal market programme norms to be involved in the first place. It is not a coincidence, for example, that the Bulgarian ‘local’ expert company was a well-known international (Western owned) management consultancy!

What of the multinational analogy?
In an earlier part of this paper we made the observation that limitations were apparent in seeking to compare the stages of evolution of international training initiatives with the growth and organisation of multinational corporations. To conclude, we will briefly return to this theme. We would note that both are areas of human activity based on Western ‘ownership’ and, frequently, the ‘flow of ideas’ from powerful economic entities to less powerful ones. In an ideological sense therefore, it is not surprising that each phenomenon described displays ambivalence in the language and reality of ‘empowering’ local interests. We should refine our previous contention that the two fields of activity are distinguishable on grounds of ‘organisational coherence’ and ‘purpose’. It is instructive to observe that the organisation of international training activity is gaining a degree of institutional permanence through the establishment of international alumni and the like. Multinational corporations, on the other hand, are criticised for temporary and calculating forms of attachment to subsidiaries. It is also now clear that international training connections from West to East are not borne of philanthropy, but rather a primary focus on the ‘bottom line’.

References


