

MANAGERIAL DISCOURSE AS AN ASPECT OF GLOBALIZATION: FROM SELF-MANAGEMENT TO MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

Globalization is a heavily debated phenomenon and can be studied from many perspectives. In the present paper the perspective of the discourse of management is presented. Management as an idea and as practice is also a critically contested phenomenon in today's fast changing world. In this paper managerial discourse as an aspect of globalization is studied. The concepts of globalization, managerialism and managerial discourse are introduced and their interdependence is described. Special attention is given to the process of the so-called transition in Slovenia and its connection to the concepts of managerialism and managerial discourse. During the process of transition from one economic and political system to another managerial discourse has been adopted in Slovenia and soon constituted itself as a standard or even dominant discourse in business and economics. Some examples are drawn from Slovene newspapers and other publications to demonstrate first the difference between the socialist (self-management) discourse and managerial discourse, and second, to demonstrate the diffusion of managerial discourse to other spheres of social life.

Key words: *Managerial discourse, globalization, transition.*

1 Introduction

One possible explanation of the 1989 revolutions in Eastern and Central Europe can be given by using a rather large and somehow deeper concept of globalization.¹ Such an explanation is dealing not solely with the so-called "inner conflicts and problems" of the region, but rather with a larger context of globalization ranging from the globalization of markets and that of trades to the globalization of ideas, politics and ideologies (Gilpin 2001). To put it in another words, fundamental or even revolutionary changes were caused

not only by inner conflicts and blockades of the ex-socialist region(s), but also by larger, global contexts and contextual pressures (from global markets to the processes of globalization of democracy). These still lasting processes mostly put forward the so-called “formation of the new claims” (Sassen 1998, XX-XXXVI) from the global surrounding, fortunately, not in a violent form (with some exceptions, of course, see, for example Hadžić 2004), since the Eastern and Central European societies were already half-prepared for the change (especially after the events in Poland connected with the Solidarnosc). In the last 15 years or so the events used to be analysed mainly in terms of markets and (un)employment, of BDP or investments etc., and to a lesser extent in terms of political changes (democracy) as well as in connection with the new processes of various so-called “integrations” (European Union, Nato, see Kaldor & Vejvoda 2002).

2 The Globalizing Discourse

In this paper we are not dealing with globalization in the above mentioned form. We are rather trying to emphasize the role of a less visible form of globalization within the context of the Eastern and Central Europe. Namely, our interest goes to globalizing aspects that deal with something which could be termed as “globalization of discourse”, more concretely to the globalization of the very “discourse of globalization”. The preliminary results of our research² show that, at least in Slovenia, the globalization of that kind of discourse occupied almost all public and private channels of communication and even thinking, mainly directly (through media, scientific discourses, translations etc.) or indirectly (by way of personal communication based on dominant forms of media language). More precisely, our research shows that a special kind of that globalizing discourse in the region has taken the form of management. By speaking about the managerial discourse we are opening a problem regarding forms and channels of communication through which the globalization came in the region as well as the topics on which it persists that dominate all other public or private sub-discourses.

One of the phenomena that have started to gain more attention in debates about globalization in the region is the spread of a relatively new form not only of discourse but also of organizational behaviour that tends to cross political, economic and cultural boundaries. The profusion of this form of organizational behaviour and discourses that is becoming a preferred way of behaving (thinking, feeling and doing) not only in various organizations but in a society as a whole is termed managerialism.³ This form may not be obvious; in fact it wasn't at all until the turn of the 20th century. But today it does seem to be a normal state of affairs, or better, of mind. (It is interesting – and symptomatic – that the transition processes in the region are also described as normal.) We are facing a quite interesting situation: everybody is getting used to look on organizational issues from the exclusive point of view of managers, without any consciousness of that exclusivity. Everybody (public parlance as well as that in private surroundings) is turning to

management practices with the assumption that they will provide a solution for all kinds of problems; not only economic or business problems in a narrower sense, but also political, social, and even individual issues. It seems that management practices accompanied by an ideology (“the emergence of a new ideology”, Entemann 1993) are supported by a whole set of values that have been successfully globalised.

When we refer to managerialism, we actually have in our minds the managerial discourse in its three meanings, first as a tool of globalization, second as its form, and third as its very context. The point we would like to emphasize is that managerialism is first of all a kind of discourse which, at least within the mentioned region, is playing a double role: that of mega-discourse as well as that of meta-discourse. Managerialism is a mega-discourse in the sense that it covers almost all possible topics of thinking (it seems that by using the term managerialism it is possible to say everything), and it is a meta-discourse, first of all because it implicitly and explicitly presents itself as the language beyond ideology, a kind of pure language. To put it in post modern (poststructuralist) parlance, it is playing the role of master-discourse, of master-language in regard to which generality, objectivity and purity (trans-ideology) of other languages/discourses are something partial, if not less or completely unimportant. To put it in more concrete terms: self-management as one master-discourse was – of course not mechanically, but by way of the complex play of negation/confirmation – replaced by another one, that of management or managerialism. Subjects as carriers of discourse have dramatically (revolutionary!) changed. “The Worker and Worker’s Party” were replaced by “The Manager and Managerialism”. If in the past it was possible to explain – at the level of discourse - almost everything by the use of the magic word of Worker, now it is possible to explain almost everything by the use of the magic word of Manager. If it was possible to give the solution for almost all problems by the use of the highest Sign-of-all-signs, that of Worker, now is, likewise, possible to give the solution for almost all the problems by the very use of the highest Sign-of- all-signs, that of Manager.

As far as the language and the kind of former discourses in the region are concerned, there used to be an important difference between the regions of former Yugoslavia and other parts of the so-called Eastern and Central Europe. While the larger part of the region (under direct influence of USSR) used to understand itself in terms of state and party language of work, Yugoslavia used to be self-defined as the state and social system of the so-called self-management (*samoupravljanje*). We are not saying that the system of self-management was not a party or a state system, similar to that in the region that was under the influence of the Soviets, but that the kind of media self-understanding of the Yugoslav form of socialism used to be quite different, especially at the level of discourse (and ideology). The discourse of self-management was for at least 30 years, in a way, domesticated, the population considered it as something already known and domestic. Then, during the transition period the new managerial discourse completely replaced the old one. It seems to us that the new

discourse was somehow domesticated, too. The replacement of discourses was not abrupt as in other countries with the Soviet-like system. We could guess that those countries which had not been forced to internalize the self-management discourse adopted and internalized the new discourse somehow easier than those countries of the Central and Eastern Europe, where the state-party discourse was not so deeply accepted. In other words, the changes dealing with transition at the level of understanding were less dramatic and less visible in former Yugoslavia than in other parts of the Eastern and Central Europe.

3 Managerial Discourse in Slovenia in the Period of Transition

Discourse for us is a set of meanings that represent some aspect of the social world in a particular way. It is an element of all social processes and as such it may initiate, enable, and influence changes in the social world. We could claim that every reform comes with a new discourse which tries to replace the old one. The greater the reform is – that is, the more aspects of political, economic, or/and social life does it incorporate – the greater the difference between the old and the new discourse is.

When Fairclough talks about language in the new capitalism, he claims that language "is becoming more central and more salient [...] than in earlier forms of capitalism" (Fairclough 2002, 163). He deduces this from the frequent description of new capitalism as knowledge or information based. It is not just knowledge based, he claims, but also

discourse led, for knowledges are produced, circulated and consumed as discourses (economic, organizational, managerial, political, educational and so forth). Moreover, discourses are dialectically materialized in the 'hardware' and 'software' of organizations, enacted as ways of acting and interacting, and inculcated (through a variety of processes including, e.g. 'skills training') as ways of being, as identities. [...] So that transformations of organizations (workplaces, universities, local government, etc.) under the pressure of restructuring and re-scaling are partly, and significantly, semiotic and linguistic transformations. (Fairclough 2002, 163)

The difference between the socialist (so-called self-management) discourse and the managerial discourse can be illustrated by comparing two texts published two decades apart. The first text is taken from the first 1980 issue of a publication *Luški glasnik*, and the second from the first 2000 issue of the same journal.⁴

1.

Letošnje leto bo pomenilo za *delovne ljudi in občane* naše republike leto *izjemnih naporov* za dosledno *stabilizacijo gospodarskih gibanj* in razvoja na sploh. Še posebej bomo soočeni z dodatnimi naporimi vsi *delavci, ki s svojimi proizvodi in storitvami neposredno sodelujemo* v mednarodni menjavi blaga in storitev. [...] *Delavci Luke stopamo v leto 1980 še z dodatnimi obveznostmi in nalogami, ki bodo od vseh zahtevale izjemne napore in dosledno borbo za*

uresničitev dogovorjenih nalog in ciljev. [...] v preteklih letih izvajanja sanacijskega programa smo ob podpori širše družbene skupnosti dosegli pomembne gospodarske, politične in samoupravne uspehe. [...] Najbolj pomembne uspehe smo dosegli na področju utrjevanja samoupravnih in medsebojnih odnosov pri uveljavljanju vloge in položaja ZK pri utrjevanju varnosti in družbene samozaščite. Brez dvoma je k temu pripomoglo uspešno razreševanje ključnih vprašanj družbenega standarda, sistema delitve osebnih dohodkov in uvajanja nove poslovne organiziranosti kot izhodišča za bodočo samoupravno reorganiziranost. [...] Opredeljene naloge zahtevajo od slehernega delavca Luke odgovorno in disciplinirano obnašanje tako v procesu dohodka kakor tudi pri odločanju o njegovi delitvi.

2.

Poslovna odličnost kot cilj – Lansko leto je Luka Koper končala, tako kot vrsto zadnjih let, z dobrimi poslovnimi rezultati. Ves čas *ponudbo storitev prilagajamo razvoju potreb uporabnikov* in jo razvijamo v smeri nadgrajevanja osnovnih pristaniških storitev z zagotavljanjem logistične, marketinške, investicijske, finančne in trgovinske podpore. Rezultat skrbi za *zadovoljstvo kupcev so tržni uspehi. [...]*

Temelj je kakovost storitev. Kakovost storitev je ena naših temeljnih usmeritev. Da bi naše dejavnosti še bolj prilagodili zahtevam strank, smo se odločili za *nadgrajevanje sistema kakovosti z vpeljavo elementov poslovne odličnosti.* Znanje in tehnologija, nadgrajena z elementi *celovite kakovosti*, se odražata tudi na stroškovnem poslovanju. [...]

Razvoj kadrov in posodobitve. Zavedamo se *pomena človeškega dejavnika za uspešnost poslovanja*, zato bo *kadrovska dejavnost* letos usmerjena v integracijo sistema *razvoja kadrov* v vsakodnevno prakso, uresničitev ukrepov za *doseganje ciljev zadovoljstva zaposlenih, usposobitev uspešnih vodilnih in vodstvenih timov* in izboljševanje *izobrazbene strukture zaposlenih.* *Skladno s tržnimi usmeritvami* in aktivnostmi bodo naložbe usmerjene v tehnološko posodabljanje, avtomatizacijo in informatizacijo tehnoloških postopkov.

In the first paragraph the stress is placed on the role of the worker. The tasks and aims that the workers are supposed to realize are not implemented to the individuals by someone else but are, as explicated, *agreed upon*. The Worker is the agent; it is implicated that he is active and has the power and responsibility to affect and change his social and political environment and not just affect his firm's business successfulness. While in the text from the 1980 the use of the 1st person plural⁵ is emphasized, in the text from the year 2000 the use of the 1st person plural is not explicit any more, although we cannot claim it disappeared. The word that has "disappeared" is the word worker; it has been replaced by the words human resource and employees. The stress is placed upon the customer and the entire firm's effort is directed towards satisfying the customer; nobody talks about changing the whole society any more.

It is not possible to separate managerial discourse from managerial ideology, which legitimizes existing power relations. When we accept things as they are, as taken for granted, then ideology is at work. "The most effective use of power occurs when those with power are able to get those who have less power to interpret the world from the former's

point of view. Power is thus exercised through consent rather than coercion." (Mumby and Clair 1998, 184). This is recognizable from the next two paragraphs taken from a local newspaper; the article is about unemployment and dismissals in one of the Slovene regions called Slovenska Istra. The journalist includes few statements of the secretary of the local union:

Slovenski sindikati, ki so med prvimi, ki se morajo boriti za pravice zaposlenih (kar od njih ljudje tudi pričakujejo), menijo, da je za nastali položaj krivo premalo investicij. "Pri nas se odpira premalo novih podjetij, ki bi ustvarjala nova delovna mesta," komentira generalni sekretar Obalne sindikalne organizacije (OSO) Euro Brozič. In za to je kriva predvsem vlada, ki ne ustvari ugodnih pogojev. [...] Najhujši problem pa je po Brozičevih besedah davčna politika in to, da smo že na splošno država, polna omejitev na vseh področjih.

Ljudje so se v nekdanjem socialističnem sistemu počutili varno. Ko so dobili službo, so jo ponavadi obdržali do odhoda v pokoj. Danes pa živimo v kapitalizmu, ki je neizprosno predvsem do tistih, ki se niso pripravljene dodatno izobraževati, prekvalificirati ali pa menjati služb. A pogledati je treba tudi v zakulisje sistema, poudarja Brozič. "Družbe propadajo, a problem je, da ni dovolj investicij, razvojnih načrtov in projektov. Ugodnega okolja za to ne pomagajo ustvarjati niti banke."⁶

Managerial discourse has found its way through the local workers' organization to legitimize managerialism. The secretary of the union does not doubt in managers or owners of the companies; he joins them in claiming more freedom from state regulations; and blames the government for the actual situation (job losses). The journalist also takes that point of view when claiming that the capitalist system in which we live today is inexorable *mainly* towards those individuals, "who are not prepared to additionally educate or retrain themselves", or even "change their jobs." So, we have two possible sources of this unfavourable situation for the workers. One is the state and its rigid regulations, the other the inflexible individual himself. The claims for deregulation and flexible workers sound very managerial-like. In such a way the existing power relations are legitimized.

Managerial discourse also affects everyday life. From the newspapers, magazines, television etc. we get some advice on how to improve the management of our own life, and an insight into skills of self-management:

Kdo se ne bi želel bolje spoznati in odkriti lastnih skritih talentov? Verjetno bi med nami težko našli posameznika, kaj bi v svojem življenju še lahko učinkovito razvijal na osebnem ali poslovnem področju. Star pregovor pravi, da se učimo celo življenje, in učimo se zase, da bi dosegali kvalitetnejše pogoje za življenje in delo. Res pa je tudi, da nas včasih splet okoliščin pripelje do napačnih odločitev, ki so največkrat povezane s kariernimi in osebnimi dosežki. Vedno bolj pa smo osveščeni, da lahko v svojem življenju še marsikaj spremenimo, če le prepoznamo svoj cilj.⁷

We are advised to run our own life as if it were a business; to start planning early in life to achieve the goals we want. The importance of lifelong learning is stressed also in the next article where the idea of a kind of index containing all the hobbies, activities etc. of an individual, starting from his early years and the very first hobbies, is suggested (second paragraph):

Zadovoljni in dejavni ljudje obnavljajo svojo energijo tako, da se vse življenje učijo, dopolnjujejo prejšnje znanje in odkrivajo nova veselja. [...] Bodoči delodajalec bi iz spiska dodatnih znanj in dejavnosti lahko razbral, kaj nas zanima, smo dovolj dinamični in razgledani za zeleno službo, imamo morda kakšna posebna nagnjenja, ki bi bila zanjo koristna, predvsem pa naredijo številna različna zanimanja dober vtis: kažejo, da smo najbrž inovativni in se ne ustrašimo novih izzivov.⁸

6 Conclusion

It is clear that the language of management has become The language (dominant and authoritative language) of post-socialist societies. The more it presents itself as objective and neutral, the more it is ideological and supports managerialism as the new dominant ideology which has replaced the old one, that of self-management. Objectivity and neutrality of managerial discourse is just one of the possible forms of naturalisation; not solely of all relations in the concrete society but above all of the common picture in which everything appears to be natural. It is not accidental that in the last fifteen years the main discursive machinery has been based on the “argument” of normality, neutrality and naturalness of management (capitalism) and that of not-normality (unnaturalness) of self-management (socialism). In other words, quite an old matrix of theological demonism (based on the distinction between Good and Evil) is again on the ride. At least as far as the managerial discourse is concerned one would say that we have moved from a one-sided (socialist) type of discursive demonism (after 1945) towards another one-sided position within the law of the movement of one and the same pendulum. Everything which used to be positive has now become negative, and vice versa. In that sense managerial discourse is not a neutral tool for communication (among people and organisations) but a symbolical space within which that revolutionary change has taken place. Last but not least: the neutral term transition is in that sense one of the best symptoms of the managerial ideology and its discursive practice.

Notes

¹ Speaking about globalization we have in mind mostly a heterogeneous conceptual development of global discourse presented in Kofman and Youngs (2003).

² The paper is part of a larger research project report currently in progress at the Faculty of Management Koper. The research “Managerial Discourse: Ideological, Political and Ethical Dimensions” is a combination of field work (approximately 100 structured, deep interviews) and theoretical investigations. It is currently in its first phase and should be accomplished in 2007.

³ Managerialism is a term that was coined at the beginning of the 1990s mainly within the conceptual debates in the US and British academia and some sub-academic research circles. One of the best conceptualizations of managerialism can be found in Entemann 1993. Some authors operate within the conceptual framework of the so-called managerial revolution. Parts of the debate dealing with managerial revolution can be found in Koch 1998 (jobs, wealth and happiness aspects), Hammer & Champy 2001 (company and corporation aspects), Chandler Jr. 2002 (historical aspects of the USA), Brown 2001 (aspects of marketing), Shenhav 2002 (philosophical and theoretical aspects) etc. To a certain degree the debate and researches about managerialism are still within the larger context of influence being put forward by P. F. Drucker's search for new definitions in his Post-capitalist society (Drucker 1993).

⁴ Luški glasnik is the internal publication of the organization Luka Koper (Port of Koper). The translation of the two texts follows.

1.

This year the working people and members of the community of our republic will have to strive for a consistent stabilization of economic movements and development in general. In particular workers who are directly involved in the international exchange of goods and services will be confronted with additional efforts. [...] The year 1980 brings additional tasks and obligations also to workers of Luka Koper (Port of Koper). We will have to demonstrate exceptional efforts and will have to strive for realization of the tasks and aims agreed. [...] by compiling a sanation programme over the past years we have, with the support of a wider social community, achieved an important economic, political and self-management success. [...] Major success has been achieved in the consolidation of self-managing and mutual relationships, and the affirmation of the role and position of the League of Communists in the process of strengthening the security and social self-protection. Undoubtedly, this has been made possible by a successful solution of the key problems regarding social standard, the distribution of personal income and the introduction of a new business organization as a starting point for the future self-managing reorganization. [...] The defined tasks demand from each worker of Luka Koper a responsible and disciplinary behaviour in the process of the income as well as in the process of deciding about its distribution.

2.

Business excellence as a goal – Last year, as many years in the past, Luka Koper achieved good business results. The offer of services is accustomed to the needs of users all the time and is being developed in the sense of upgrading the basic port services with the aim to assure logistic, marketing, investment, financial and commercial assistance. By focusing on customer care we have achieved market success. [...]

We are oriented towards quality of services. In order to further adapt our activities to the needs of customers we have decided to upgrade the system of quality by introducing elements of business excellence. Knowledge and technology, upgraded with elements of integral quality, are reflected also on expenditure operations. [...]

Development of human resources and modernization. We are aware of the importance of the human factor for the successfulness of the operations, that is why this year's human resource activity will be oriented towards integration of the human resource development system in everyday practice, realization of measures for achieving customer satisfaction, qualification of successful leadership and management teams, and an increase of education levels of employees. Our investments will be oriented towards technological modernization, automatization and informatization of technological processes in accordance with market directions and activities.

⁵ In the Slovene language the person can be expressed by a pronoun and also by the verb conjugation.

⁶ Slovene trade unions that are the first that have to fight for the rights of employees (that is indeed what people expect from them) are of the opinion that the present situation has been caused by not enough investments. "Far too many companies are opening new offices in the coastal towns and creating new jobs" comments Euro Brozič, secretary general of the Coastal Trade Union Organization. The blame goes mainly to the government which is not able to create favourable conditions. [...] According to Brozič the worst problem lies in the fiscal policy and in the fact that Slovenia is in general a state full of limitations in all areas.

In the former socialist system the people felt safe. When they got a job, they held it until retirement. Today we live in capitalism that is inexorable with people who are not prepared to further educate or retrain themselves or even change their job. Brozič is of the opinion that we should also look behind the scene. "Companies are ruined, but the problem is that there are not enough investments, development plans and projects. Even banks are not able to create a more favourable environment."

⁷ This is an advertisement for Zavod za alternativno izobraževanje. The translation:

Who does not want to know himself better and discover his own talents? We will hardly find anyone who does not wish to develop his personal or work related skills. An old saying states that we learn throughout our whole life. We learn for ourselves, to reach better working and life conditions. It is also true that sometimes, due to circumstances beyond our control, we take wrong decisions that affect our personal and career achievements. We are becoming more and more conscious of the fact that we can change a lot in our life, we just have to discover/identify our objectives.

⁸ It is a part of a newspaper article: Sonja Grizila, "Živiš, dokler se učiš", *Jana*, 6th September 2005, pp. 37–38. The translation follows:

Happy and active people restore their energy by studying their whole life, upgrading their knowledge and discovering new spaces [...] Our future employer could, from the list of our additional skills and activities, gather if we are dynamic and well-read, if we have some special interests and predispositions that could best suit his/her needs. Different interests make a good impression – they show our innovativeness and readiness to take new challenges.

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