

Theses of Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation

**MANAGEMENT AND HUMANITIES:
*SPIRITUALISING BUSINESS AND CORPORATE
LIFE***

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Subject and Objectives

Present dissertation aims to reveal the integrated relationship of management and humanities. It is about to prove that the intellectual, spiritual, literary, and artistic perspectives are inherent elements in the fields of business and management studies. This is the approach implicated in the – title's – term of *spiritualising* economy and corporate life. My paper illustrates the characteristics of this integrated managerial thinking with examples picked out of the oeuvres of two prominent management study authors, Peter Drucker and Charles Handy.

Peter Drucker is usually considered to be the first *philosopher* of modern management and business life, so as Charles Handy to be one of the most influential management study author nowadays. Thus their reception in Hungary is mostly limited to the fields of management books and business journalism. However, it is my conviction that the works of Drucker and Handy may be useful and pleasurable readings for both the humanities scholars and the wider audience; because these works are not only tries to frame the managerial thinking, but they are also about to *spiritualise* the late capitalist society. But what are the roots of this vocation in the oeuvres of these two authors? Their careers are quite unique and groundbreaking. In the life course of Peter Drucker artistic affinities, historical reflexivity, and the the man of letters identity had central roles beside the legal education, experience in academic life and commercial/bank sector, or the scholarly reasearch and management consultancy. This versatile career and experience background was exactly what established the status of Drucker as an unique thinker, who had world wide influence and popularity in management studies, and gained appreciation among business and political leaders. Nor is the life course of Charles Handy customary. He graduated in classics, history, and philosophy. Then he worked for the giant company Shell International, in different marketing positions. However, by his own account, this type of job had exploited him so much that he left the company after ten years. So, he redirected his career and joined a business executive programme at MIT, then became professor at London Business School. After a while, he quit business education, and built up a versatile career for himself: he worked as a consultant, public speaker and freelance author paralelly. In the books, which established his management study reputation, he concentrated on leadership styles and corporate behaviour. Moreover, he was a regular guest speaker on BBC Radio's morning programme entitled *Thought for the Day* – in which he was the only layperson among the representatives of different churches. His *mini-sermons* written for the programme departed from the questions of management or corporate culture, and instead, they studied the moral obligations and

transcendental aspects of everyday work or the conduct of life. It is no wonder that he was frequently called a secular vicar or practical philosopher.

On the basis of the above characteristics, my objective is to reveal a model of management which, instead of a *dialectical* relationship between business and humanities, suggests that the intellectual-spiritual aspects are already inherent and determinative parts of economy and corporate life, and not only external, occasional inspirator or *decoration* of fit. I illustrate this integration with the analysis of the works of Peter Drucker and Charles Handy, by which I am to prove that meanwhile these authors are dealing with the questions of management (business culture, entrepreneurial spirit, leadership, and corporate life), of their writings' textual practice flashes some interesting literary aspects.

The oeuvres of these authors link my dissertation *culturally/philologically* to Anglo-Saxon context, meanwhile in terms of chronology to the last decades of 20th century and the first years of 21st century. Probably, these time indices may provoke remarks which would suggest that the management studies' insights on cultural and intellectual aspects, formulated before the financial and economic crisis of 2008, are not so legitimate nowadays, because of the economic shrinkage and austerities. Though the situation may be interpreted the other way around: it is exactly the global crisis which has made more significant the cultural factors (e.g. value-based approaches, stakeholder perspectives, moral-solidary obligations, social inequality, the questions of self-control, and transcendental-philosophical aspects) which are in the focus of the management works I analyse in my dissertation.

Meanwhile it is near a commonplace at the global level that the intellectual-cultural determinations, the inherent human values, and the humanities skills may have important role in business-corporate life; this insight still does not have comprehensive and profound influence in Hungary: that is, the idea of (and the management of) corporate culture is not always/everywhere appropriately conscious or reflexive in Hungarian economy and scientific discourses. Besides, certainly, there are also quite a lot of good examples in the fields of organizational research and managerial praxis in our country – either based on foreign models, or developed originally. Furthermore, it is an especially influential development that the book series *HVG könyvek* – and other similar publishing initiatives – has legitimised, widened, and popularised the business and management literature in Hungary since the turn of the millennium. These phenomena increase the actuality of my dissertation's subject.

Analytical Perspectives and Research Methods

In connection with the objectives set above, it would be by all means an interesting and useful aspect to search for the new possibilities (or disciplinary *survival*) of literary studies; but my dissertation does not concentrate on this question. Instead, it has a versatile research interest which – through combining the perspectives of organizational studies, cultural economics, and literary-rhetoric analysis – tries to demonstrate the inevitable integrated relationship of management and humanities skills (that is, a kind of *management of meaning*). I attach directly to each chapter an analytical case study (*white paper*), so as to expand and illustrate immediately the possible aspects of the certain topics of each chapter.

For this integrated approach, we can find a creative and inspiring thinking model in the book (entitled *Economics of Good and Evil*) by Tomáš Sedláček, the Czech economist with groundbreaking views. Because he claims that while economics is considered nowadays – as well among the economists, as in the common knowledge – rather to be a mathematically modelled, value-neutral, technocratic discipline focusing mostly on cost allocations; actually it is a much more complex area. Since, under the surface of mathematical and statistical models, in fact the psychological, philosophical, ethical, religious, mythical, and poetic themes are in the focus of economics. But as the interest in these aspects declined in 19th-20th century economics, Sedláček suggests that his discipline – especially after the crisis of 2008 – should urgently rediscover its own inherent intellectual-cultural values. Though, these insights are not so recent developments. In the 1980-90s, after the long period during which the cultural aspects had been regarded as low-status elements in economic thinking and business praxis, intellectual-spiritual values and the processes of meaning construction became the central questions in business life and management studies. Since in late capitalism the primary challenge for corporations is to offer meaning and belief in work for their employees, because it is – among others – one of the main preconditions for being successfully competitive in flexible, globalised markets.

Based on the inspiring sources and antecedent mentioned above, I argue for the literary aspects of management. However, in connection with this, it is necessary to define in what sense I declare the oeuvres of my two central authors to have literary characteristics. Above all, I have to make it clear that the works of Peter Drucker and Charles Handy – certainly – are not parts of belles lettres. Instead, we should consider the achievements of these authors as a kind of mental *endeavour* or intellectual *flow of energy*, which proves that Drucker and Handy are thinking about burning existential questions versatily and dynamically; and for articulating this, they are able to interweave creatively the quite different discourses of

business, ethics, transcendence, and art. That is, though the works of these authors mostly lack (or possess little of) the literary reflexivity and complexity, sometimes they may *flash* some of these linguistic-literary characteristics or operations. The aim of these loci is to be *connecting points* for grabbing and *involving* readers, and then to do a kind of intellectual-spiritual work on them. In other words, the texts of Drucker and Handy try to provide new perspectives and *visions*, which are out of the conventional thinking/linguistic patterns of management or conduct of life. Thus the characteristics of my two central authors' works may partly be considered to be literary achievements (being able to show certain poetic and tropological operations); but rather they should be described as some kind of intellectual *flow of energy* which I interpret on the basis of Kenneth Burke's – let me call it – *social theory of communication*.

I chose this theoretical framework, and I call it so, because in the Burkean worldview language and literature is regarded as a system of ideas and forms which – by helping the orientation among different perspectives implied in certain situations – determines the *social identity* (that is, the strategies of identifications and separation), and thus it gives recommendations for appropriate forms of social action. On the other hand, we cannot forget about the fact that Burke denied the direct connection between illocution and perlocution. (It is not an accident that he wrote two different books on *A Grammar of Motives* and on *A Rhetoric of Motives*.) Thus, on the basis of Burkean views, the way by which ideas and linguistic forms connect to social action cannot be considered as simple and direct transmission, but as an act of *translation* which can be illustrated most appropriately by the concept of *deflection*. Since maybe it is this deflection which can be identified with – let me call it – the *in-between communication sphere* assigned as research area in the introduction of *A Rhetoric of Motives*. This sphere is but *rhetoric* itself defined as a mode of communication which is neither wholly deliberate or directly purposive, nor wholly unconscious or aimless. Because of this in-betweenness, it *deflects* at the same time from pure illocution and from the direct intentions of perlocution. Nevertheless, this in-between characteristic may appear not only in the field of verbal-textual utterances, but also in the order of social coexistence, behaviours, and actions. And since Burke in *A Rhetoric of Motives* actually endeavoured to rediscover rhetorical dimensions on areas where these have been hidden or forgotten about; the thus revived rhetorical analysis – a broadened to be a general method – may focus not only on literary texts, but also onto social connections and actions. That is why the focal point of the Burkean rhetoric is the idea of *identification*, instead of *persuasion*. Since rhetoric in this sense – considered to be a constant rivalry between identification and separation – may appear

as a kind of *stake* in various situations: that is, in political, legal, ceremonial, and literary discourses. Consequently, Burke's views suggest that literature may be determined not solely/primarily by the poetic virtuosity, but also by a „witchcraft” or „wonder-working spell” which yields a kind of „literature for use”, though this use cannot be identified with some sort of practical utilitarianism, because of its *rituality* and *magic*. In my dissertation, the terms of *literature* and *literary* are based on this *spell* of Burkean rhetoric (that is, the in-betweenness of poetic *autonomy* and direct *application*), and also on the dynamics of identification and separation (which deeply permeate the institutions of social relationships and thus, for instance, the market/economic relations, in the form of cooperation and exploitation). Although the context for the rhetorical view of literature could have been founded on the works and insights of authors like Wayne C. Booth or Paul de Man; it is my conviction that Kenneth Burke's approach is the legitimate one for the present paper. As the Burkean term of rhetoric is able to combine – though does not connect directly – the social actions' dynamism and imagination revealed in intellectual and textual achievements. This is because rhetoric is filled with imagination for Burke. He tries to emphasise that the acts of imagination are as important components of rhetorical dynamisms as reasoned argument is. And – as I have already referred to it above – the Burkean term of rhetoric does not cover only textual/verbal phenomena, but also the social relations and actions. Thus arises a dilemma for Burke here: how imagination is able to play an intermediary role between the mind's inner work and its exterior environment. This question of the rhetorical-social function of imagination lead us through to the field of management, since the managerial-entrepreneurial *vision's* effect on the praxis of business/corporate life is quite an important problem in management studies

Results

At the beginning of my paper, I establish (in chapter 1) a social theoretical context by mapping the discourses of late capitalist society and those of organizational culture researches. During this, I point out that the (self-)management literature came into focus after the middle of 20th century, because late capitalism had to face with its chief challenges in the world of corporate life and in the field of managing consumer/employee identities. Thus, at the end of the last century, the rigorous bureaucratization of organizational-corporate forms framing the social coexistence was questioned, and the dilemmas about the *soul* or spirituality of workplace life came into the limelight. In parallel with this, verbal elements gained important role in managing corporate culture, because they were thought to *fashion* the

thinking and behaviour of the stakeholders of organizations, and thus to become a kind of intermediary between the intellectual and habitual-material aspects of workplace life.

As a consequence of the developments summarised above, and supplemented with the viewpoint of cultural economics, my insight (in chapter 2) is that writing and physical book may have important role in corporate culture and business life. This is based on the *discreteness* and *discreetness* – that is, physical closedness and intellectual-spiritual tactfulness – inherent in the medium of printed texts, which are able to pick out the elements of corporate culture from the everyday – nowadays mostly digitalised – content/information flow, and to make these elements long-lasting. All this is founded by the culture broker role played by the book industry, both in its historical traditions and contemporary institutional system.

I point out in my dissertation (namely, in chapter 3) that the (self-)management books' intermediary functions cannot be limited to the – so called – „epiphany industry”, that is, to the field of simplification of ideas to easily consumable content units. As this type of literature has really serious cultural-religious traditions. Self-help books, in their 19th-century beginnings were not regarded as tools for some kind of psychological self-development, rather as part of a socioculturally contextualised self- and business-management. So do I use the term in this sense, and consider the writings of my central authors to be this sort of works. As I reveal, the intellectual and literary traditions of spiritual self-management and that of conduct of life deeply rooted back – through the 19th-century North-American *success literature* and Transcendentalism – to the Puritanism of the 17th century. In all of these antecedents the chief achievement of the self-managing process – through prayer or meditation – was the intermediation between the levels of individuality and generality. It is my conviction that book or literary reading may offer the same intermediary function for contemporary business and corporate life. The examples of literature enthusiast corporate leaders and the positive feedbacks of literary workshops organised for managers proved that literary reading may improve the skills of *worldconceptualisation* (and those of communicating it toward others), true to the original meaning of *poiesis*. Since *creation* and *formation* is also a genuine characteristic of entrepreneurial-business activities: in the form of introducing new product categories, or innovative thinking, or revolutionary business models. That is why poetry, through *training* imagination, may contribute indirectly to the evolvement of visionary and creative business solutions. So, we can say that the business and poetic activities are strongly integrated, since both of them creates order from chaos by the help of imagination (either in the form of poetic invention, or in the form of renewing business

models). On this basis, managers may consider literary reading as a kind of *playground* guaranteeing the liberation of mind, the connection of different types of thinging, or the involvement of unusual and innovative insights.

I illustrate (in chapter 4) this logic by the thinking model of Peter Drucker, who is usually said to be one of the most influential *guru* in management studies; however, he rather preferred to consider himself to be a social historian or philosopher. In the Drucker-oeuvre, the praxis of management consultancy was interpreted as a work on mind, soul, and imagination intended to inspire or *move* mentally and spiritually by the help of philosophical aspects, historical depth, and linguistic inventions (like metaphors, new terms, anecdotes, and parables). On the basis of these aspects, the works of Peter Drucker may become literary achievement, though mostly he did not write pieces of belles lettres in traditional sense. My dissertation, among others, points out that, according to the logic of Drucker's thinking, the relationship between the *materiality* of business/industry and the spiritual/moral values behind it could be imagined as the dynamics of written letter and metaphoric meaning. Thus, it was not an accident that Drucker sometimes called himself a "wordsmith", and that is why he urged us to regard management as a part of *liberal arts*.

Finally, in the case of Charles Handy, I try to reveal (in chapter 5) why he is said to be the creator of philosophical elegance and eloquence for business thinking. It was already a consensus that Handy, through unique verbal and spiritual achievement, spiritualised areas which had been either too *dry*/rationalised or too banal/sentimental. My detailed analyses illustrate firstly how Handy adapted/secularised for his own aims the traditional genre of sermon in his radio speeches (which were also published in print). During this, I demonstrate how in these Handy texts the different perspectives/mindsets – in terms of rhetoric, pragmatics – interweave into each other. Secondly, I point out how a popular narrative technique of management literature, storytelling, may sometimes reflect on its own constructedness or artificiality. And through this, it is manifested that the insights thought to be obvious in the poetics of storytelling are but pretentious and fictive/illusory inventions of *stories* itself. Thirdly, I exemplify Handy's skill to create peculiar metaphor which cannot be easily visualised, only as imagined images, and this is exactly the characteristic which bases the inspiring, mind-forming, and *visionary* effects of these metaphors. Fourthly, I highlight that the dynamics between different pragmatic agents make some – originally meditative or essayistic – loci of Handy similar to the *rhetoric of spiritual conduct* working in prayers or religious meditations. All these achievements of Handy's oeuvre summarised above are about to reveal how his works may gain literary aspects, and thus they – among the other case

studies of my dissertation – can provide illustrative and interesting examples of the integrated relationship of management and humanities.

List of Publications

PUBLICATIONS RELATED TO THE DISSERTATION

- *A menedzsment elokvenciája Charles Handy-nél.* Korunk, 2014. Október. [Megjelenés előtt, közlésre igazoltan elfogadva.]
- *A szellem mint az üzleti élet innovátora: Peter Drucker és a menedzsment művészete.* Alföld, 2014. Június. 65-75.
- *Vállalati könyvkultúra a Zapposnál.* PR Herald (online szakfolyóirat). 2014.03.11-13. (három részletben):
<http://www.prherald.hu/2014/03/vallalati-konyvkultura-a-zapposnal-1-resz/>
<http://www.prherald.hu/2014/03/vallalati-konyvkultura-a-zapposnal-2-resz/>
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- *Saját gyártású sztori a példázatok hitelességéről.* Közösség, 2014. 1. szám. 12-13.
- *Lelkipásztorok örököse: Charles Handy életfilozófiájáról.* Közösség, 2012. 4. szám. 14-15.

FURTHER PUBLICATIONS

Articles and book chapters

- *Szentivánéji helytelenség.* In: Bényei Péter – Fazakas Gergely Tamás – Lapis József – Takács Miklós (szerk.): *Tanítványi Disputa: In honorem Berta Erzsébet.* Debrecen: Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó, 2013, 48-50.
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- *Az ismeretlen ismerős: Horváth Ádám: Felfedezett titok*, Kelet, 2002. 1. szám. 11-21.
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- Dunai Tamás – Oláh Szabolcs – Sebestyén Attila (szerk.): *Kultpontok: Emlékezhelyek a magyar populáris kultúrában*. Debrecen: Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó, 2012.
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Reviews

- „A vers föltámasztása papírsírjából” – Horváth Kornélia: A versről. Alföld, 2008. Január. 105-110.
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- „All the world's a stage” – Szálinger Balázs: Első Pesti Vérekabaré. Alföld, 2003. Augusztus. 96-101.

- *Mit rejt a kollégiumi költészet? – Nagy Júlia:* Református kollégiumi irodalom és kultúra a XVIII-XIX. században. Könyv és könyvtár XXIV. 2002. 213-218.
- *A (fel)halmozás kudarca – Szepesi Attila:* Planéta. Alföld, 2001. Április. 96-100.