
Editorial: IACCM and EJCCM, from where-from to where-to?

Gerhard Fink

Research Institute for European Affairs,
Vienna University of Economics and Business,
Althanstrasse 39-45, A-1090 Vienna, Austria
E-mail: gerhard.fink@wu.ac.at

Let me first of all thank all colleagues and friends for the warm reception we have had for the launch of *EJCCM*. The inaugural issue 2009-1 contains a few submitted papers and several outstanding critical contributions reflecting state of the art research. More of that will come in the next issues. With the shorter invited contributions we hope to stimulate a thought-provoking exchange of views. We now invite our readers to contribute to this discussion with further brief statements about neglected or overemphasised fields of research, methodological issues, dominant and emerging paradigms and the open or hidden political agenda of current cross cultural research. We aim at a broad view of the field. To use a metaphor coined by Magala (2005, p.12): 'Building a bridge of Babel instead of the tower of Babel'.

Let me share some aspects of my experiences of cultural shock with you, dear friends and readers. Contrary to Rosalie, in my life I had numerous cultural shocks and almost all within the Austrian/German context.

I am a country boy from the north of Austria. My father died in World War II. My grandmother and my mother were both midwives. When I was four, my mother remarried and I stayed for almost two years mostly with my grandmother and my uncle's family. One dark night my grandmother took me by the hand and told me that from now on I would be living again with my mother and stepfather, because I would be going to school in Vienna. She packed a small bag with my few belongings. The black Ford-T car, which took us to the distant train station, had a flat tyre at an eerie corner in the middle of the woods. To this day I still recall the assurance of being with my loving grandmother during that unnerving half hour. In her profession as a midwife she was accustomed to going to places during the night in that largely wooded 50 sq km of territory that was her responsibility: whether on foot, on her motor cycle, by horse-drawn cart or by the very same car, the only taxi of the village. She spoke not a word to me. Yet her attitude, her confidence and her patience in a – for me – terrifying situation became a formative experience about the significance of non-verbal communication.

On the subsequent train journey I made three more unexpected observations. After many hours on the train we ventured on an endless bridge across a huge river. This was a breath-taking, unbelievable spectacle for the almost six year old boy who only knew small woodland creeks. It was his first encounter with the mighty Danube. Next, I noticed several castles on top of the hills north of Vienna. I was awestruck, yet somehow disappointed. Most of these castles were much more impressive than the 'Ruine', those handsome remnants of an 800 years old castle, a landmark and the pride of my home

village. Finally, when we left the train station in Vienna, we went along a sidewalk, wide and grand, beyond my child's imagination.

At primary school, my teacher soon noticed that I was not able to express myself very well. I only spoke the local North Austrian dialect and that only poorly. I had a narrow dialect vocabulary. Many of the words I knew in my dialect had a different gender in standard Austrian German. Just like foreigners learning German, I had to learn my genders. For example, I had to unlearn 'der Butter' for 'die Butter' or 'das Teller' for 'der Teller'. In some cases the meaning of words could change with a change of gender. Think of the difference between 'der Mensch' and 'das Mensch'. I can truly say that the High German of Austria, with all its new words, was the first foreign language I learned.

My teacher knew that there could be no quick and easy solution to my relative backwardness. I still remember the day when he came to our tiny flat and told my mother that every week I should read one book from the school library. My kind teacher even fixed a flexible work place for me (a kind of moveable desk top), which could be stowed under the bed when I had finished my homework.

Sixteen years later, after I obtained my first university degree at WU-Wien, I was lucky to get a two-year grant from the Volkswagen-Stiftung to study at University of Munich. In Munich, yet again I struggled – for about one and a half years in fact – to make myself understood by my student friends and to deliver reasonable results to receive favourable grades from my professors. The gap I experienced between Austrian German and 'German German' was substantially wider than I could have imagined.

Seven years later, upon my return to Vienna and by now working at the Vienna Institute for Comparative Economic Studies, I had a completely unexpected and very strong return shock. In fact that was the strongest shock I had after my first one as a boy. For some years I had been specialising in the economics and society of communist countries, gaining insights into the politics and life in general 'in the East'. I had also first-hand witnessed the '1968 revolution' in Germany and its aftermath. I returned with capabilities, knowledge and a personal ideology, which I would not have acquired in my native Austria.

One day, seven years after my return to Austria, I received a delightful compliment from a nice Vienna girl: "Gerhard, for a German you learnt our dialect extremely well!" Then, I knew that I was home again. After that, I experienced no severe culture shocks ever again, neither during my few months in the USA at Boston University or on secondment to the World Bank nor in Soviet Russia – in Moscow and Novosibirsk, to be precise – when the Cold War was at its chilliest.

Looking back, I now realise that I had lived with the problem of getting understood by my counterparts in different German languages for the first 30 years of my life. I chose those various anecdotes because these experiences I described had a formative – and truly lasting – effect on me. I learned to assess and to put trust in non-verbal communication and to read between the lines (because all too often I could not understand what those lines were really saying). I learned that many important things perhaps might be bigger and better at other places. I am still grateful to many of my various teachers and regret that I could not personally thank them for their guidance and great support.

The collapse of communism marked another turning point in my life. Since the middle of the 1960s I had devoted myself to study society and politics, business and economic development of communist countries. Over many years the German/Austrian community of scholars always managed to keep contact with numerous people on the

other side of the Iron Curtain. I can say we had done our bit by drilling tiny holes into the iron curtain.

In 1990, together with an Austrian Bank and a former Austrian minister of finance I set up a consultancy for investment projects in the East European countries. In course of a merger involving our partner we sold our shares back to the new and larger bank, which had already several consultancies. One experience became of central importance for my further career. Quite a few projects in the East that we evaluated got into difficulties, even though the strategic fit and our financial risk assessment in the feasibility studies was seemingly sound.

When I became a Professor at WU-Wien in 1993, I was invited by Schapour Zafarpour, Director of the WU Study Abroad Center, to engage myself in the WU student exchange program. At the occasion of our first encounter I asked him about research and teaching of cross-cultural management at WU. Since he was strongly interested, but had little capacity to devote substantial effort to the field, we joined forces. I thought that I could help him with raising funds and that he would do the job with a couple of young scholars. But things worked out differently.

I had the good fortune to secure a sizeable grant from the Austrian Ministry of Science and Education. But when the time came to implement the project Schari Zafarpour unfortunately fell seriously ill. So it is that I, a rigorously trained economist, moved into the domain of cultural management. The importance of interdisciplinary research is always being stressed, but as far as I can see I am one of the very few economists to have made this particular intellectual shift.

All those years ago I had no idea about the field of cross-cultural management, but I felt a pressing need to give young Austrian and East European scholars opportunities to meet and get to know leading scholars by inviting them to Vienna. After all, I had to take full advantage of the funds we had secured. Together with a couple of students I engaged in some wishful thinking. I asked colleagues from abroad whether I might attend their courses given at the WU-summer schools. In fact, we practiced the Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) model before it was published. With socialisation, externalisation, combination and internalisation we created a common body of modest knowledge, which put us in a position to identify foreign experts, to talk to them and to get them involved into our mission. Almost everybody came, gave talks and was willing to discuss the students' research projects. During 1994–1996 at various places in Austria we organised 12 workshops and a conference. Altogether some 120 young scholars from more than 20 countries attended workshops or conferences. This encouraging outcome and the strong engagement of our guest speakers lead to the desire to find a platform, which would facilitate regular meetings even if there was no outright funding from a research grant or EU funding. So it was that in 1997 we founded IACCM.

To me, the initial 12 workshops and conferences, founding IACCM were a chance of paying tribute to my teachers. Since I could not give back to them what they had given to me, I gave it to others, who deserved it. During those 15 years many times I asked myself, why don't you concentrate your efforts in trade and business strategy or employ more often econometrics, input-output analysis or linear price theory? But, whenever I was asked whether I would be willing and able to submit another CCM proposal, to raise funds or to organise another conference I more or less instantly agreed to do so. Thus, I must confess, I got addicted – perhaps, due to the overwhelming support and the warm response of many colleagues, friends and students.

I think that is a particular strength of IACCM. From its outset, IACCM is an association of scholars dedicated to advancement of the field and support to young scholars. Young scholars should be put into a position to find an appropriate methodological approach and to get published as soon as they can. We manage to keep our minds wide open and to integrate what is worth integrating. In that sense I also see the perspectives of future cooperation between SIETAR and IACCM members. Quite a few of the young scholars who attended IACCM events became trainers and HR developers and are now engaged in SIETAR.

No one is closer to the important phenomena in organisations than staff, managers, owners and consultants of those organisations. The observations and experiences of these people are the one and only resource of phenomenon driven research as so strongly recommended by Cheng (2007) and others. On the other hand, 'nothing is quite as practical as a good theory' if we believe in the special issue of AMR 1989 (van de Ven, 1989). Good theory is the resource for good action and problem solution. While there is a huge gap between professional theory production at universities and research institutes (journal publications) and application (Oesterle and Laudien, 2007), each practitioner has her/his own short cuts, a collection of good or poor theories, good or poor stereotypes and adequate or poor patterns of behaviour.

Trainers and consultants understand themselves as intermediaries, as translators of knowledge, which is supposed to migrate from one context to another or from the near context free world of university teaching to the context constrained business world. The gap between professional and individual theory production is hardly to be closed by professional theory producers who are expected to publish in established journals, which are not read either by managers or consultants. The EJCCM founders thought it might be a good idea at least try to get the intermediaries, the trainers and consultants engaged into a new and hopefully upcoming journal.

From the outset of our network activities we aimed at publication of all worthwhile work submitted to the workshops and conferences. We had numerous publications as working papers and research reports: Grenzenloses Österreich (Workshops 1994, Bundesministerium fuer Wissenschaft, Forschung und Kunst); Kultur & Management (working paper series, Gesellschaft fuer Ostkooperation, Vienna); Copenhagen Business School, Department of Intercultural Communication and Management Occasional Papers; IDM Studien (Institute for the Danube Region and Central Europe, Vienna).

Beginning with 1998 we had our IACCM journal *Journal of Cross-Cultural Competence and Management*. While the journal sold well, we had little benefits from that success: neither in terms of revenues nor in terms of citations. Thus, we decided to find a new publisher. With great confidence, we are looking forward to a more beneficial cooperation with Inderscience Publishers.

Acknowledgements

We are most grateful to Rosalie Tung for her encouragement and support in setting up *EJCCM* as a new journal and for her willingness to share her personal story with us as *EJCCM* readers and IACCM members. This has inspired me to also reflect on where I come from, how it all began with IACCM and where we perhaps might move with IACCM and *EJCCM*.

References

- Cheng, J. (2007) 'Critical issues in international management research: an agenda for future advancement', *European Journal of International Management*, Vol. 1, Nos. 1/2, pp.23–38.
- Magala, S. (2005) *Cross Cultural Competence*, p.12, Routledge, New York.
- Nonaka, I. and Takeuchi, H. (1995) *The Knowledge-Creating Company*, Oxford University Press, New York.
- Oesterle, M-J. and Laudien, S. (2007) 'The future of international business research and the relevance gap: a German perspective', *European Journal of International Management*, Vol. 1, Nos. 1/2, pp.39–55.
- van de Ven, A.H. (1989) 'Nothing is quite so practical as a good theory', *The Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 14, No. 4, pp.486–489.