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Roles and Change in Poland**



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# Staging the new romantic hero in the old cynical theatre: on managers, roles and change in Poland

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## Summary

Poland is undergoing a major systemic shift from a centrally-planned toward a market economy. All dimensions of societal life are involved in the change. The paper discusses the current role of Polish managers against the background of what it used to be like under communism from a social constructivist perspective. The role is considered from the point of view of the actors; how they construct their role.

## Introduction

East and central European countries are undergoing dramatic change. From centrally-planned economy and monopoly rule, they are now striving to establish a new economic and political order; a western-type democracy and market economy. The process implies a vital transformation for the people: how they make sense of their everyday life, which meanings they put into their altered reality.

Poland is among the countries that are relatively advanced in the transition. One of the priorities of the subsequent governments from 1989 up till now has been the effectivization (and restructurization) of enterprises (*cf.* Płoszajski, 1991). It is considered crucial to proceed with professionalization of management and development of management education (*cf.* Kwiatkowski and Koźmiński, 1992). In this light, it is important to see how the actors themselves make sense of these changes and how they construct their social role as managers. To learn more about the processes of organizational reality is critical if we want to understand more about each other: we, 'belonging to' either of the two ex-blocks, the east and the west. Culturally, the Berlin Wall still stands where it used to, and it will remain there until we start to learn more about what life is like at the other side. If we do, we may have the opportunity to learn from each other, as e.g. Orgogozo (1992) advocates.

The paper seeks to clarify if the more intentional part of the social role<sup>1</sup> of the Polish manager has changed and, if so, in what way. The change of declared expectations is, as expected, substantial. We can perceive some signs, however, that under these declarations, there might be

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Addressee for correspondence: Monika Kostera.

<sup>1</sup> We focus on the actors' interpretations rather than those of other stakeholders, such as the society as a whole, the employees, etc.

quite different feelings, and the declarers are not necessarily eager to transform and forget about their previous experiences, beliefs and attitudes.

We believe that our comments are important for establishing a closer interaction between the west and east. The issues should be included in management education, especially for candidates for work in the ex-western bloc, such as management instructors, joint-venture managers and other direct investors, and perhaps above all, for western personnel managers responsible for a mixed, Polish-foreign workforce in Poland.

## The role of the manager

As social constructivists, we see social roles as processes of social action, ongoing and never 'completed'. We agree with Czarniawska-Joerges that '[e]very person who undertakes to play one of these roles plays it anew, tentatively' (1992, p. 125). Although patterns can be distinguished, they are not static facts but links in a network of collective action (*cf.* Weick, 1979). We adopt a theatrical metaphor where social roles are seen as theatrical roles having a more or less consistent scenario. The term 'role' is similar to that used by Goffman (1959/1981), i.e. we speak of complete roles that a person plays rather than of characters or series of 'small' roles. In the case of the manager's social role, the 'play' is much more like *commedia del'arte* than any of Shakespeare's plays<sup>2</sup>. Each role contains several 'motives', so we speak here of roles (the scenario of the role called 'manager' as a 'whole') and their elements (recurrent themes, *cf.* Berger and Luckmann, 1966/1983). The scenario contains definitions of the 'traits' of the role, which we call attributes.

What interests us here is the more intentional dimension of the manager's social role, or the one 'authored' by the representatives of the community (management practitioners and theorists). We will label this aspect the 'professional role'. The question of whether management is a profession or not is, to us, of secondary interest<sup>3</sup>. We focus on the following elements of the professional role as shown in Table 1: attributes of effectiveness (what is considered an achievement?), attributes of process ('general' rules of education and managerial skill; how things should be done), and ethical attributes (code of ethics) (*cf.* Schein's (1968) definition of a profession). Attributes of effectiveness, or task-related elements, are related more to the output (what is to be done?). The latter two, which we label 'professional standards', relate more to the qualities of the process (how and by whom is it to be done?). Together, these professional standards constitute the cultural 'barriers of entry' to the profession, i.e. a person not living up to the expectations satisfactorily will not be considered a professional by representatives of the community. Management education teaches about the management process to a certain degree, but such education is also a sign of status in society and within the enterprise. The process category embraces two criteria: the rules ('how') and the conditions of the performer's image ('who'). As for skills, experience is perhaps the most salient for managers, but also certain abilities, such as 'people skills'.

<sup>2</sup> On theatrical metaphors in organization theory and management as *commedia del'arte* see e.g. Czarniawska-Joerges (1992c, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> On a discussion of whether management is a profession or something else, e.g. an art, see e.g. Schein (1968), Furusten (1992), Sarapata (1992).

Table 1. Elements of the professional dimension of manager's social role

Elements of the professional dimension of the manager's social role		Attributes	Definitions in the scenario
Task		Effectiveness: what is considered an achievement?	What should be done?
Standards	Education	'General rules' of management process; acquired through education and experience	How should the job be done? By whom?
	Code of ethics	Ethics; what is moral, decent, acceptable; what is immoral, intolerable, unacceptable?	
Self-image		Characteristics of a good performer of the role	Who is a 'good manager'?

An extra element of the professional role we take up here is managers' self-image, or their own definition of a 'good manager'. This is neither a task nor a standard, but using the theatrical metaphor, it is the actors' esteem: what the community believes is a good role performance.

The manager role in Poland is heavily engaged in the process of transition, as the move from a centrally-planned to a market economy implies a new position for enterprises and their managers. In the paper, we first consider the professional role of 'communist' managers in yesterday's Poland and then, against this background, we present findings from a preliminary study of the professional role of contemporary Polish managers.

## The social role of the manager in yesterday's Poland

In communist Poland, both the task-related elements and the professional standards of the managerial role were context-specific, and had therefore different attributes than the western roles (the scenario was different, so probably was the play itself).

In order to learn about the professional role of the manager of the past, we carried out a library research and a short window study (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992b). We interviewed five managers who had experience with managing a state-owned enterprise before 1989. All but one were still active professionally, some within their own business and some with a foreign enterprise. They were all men over 50 with higher education.

### *Task-related elements*

In communist Poland, all production means were *de jure* property of the society and *de facto* of the monopolist state (*cf.* Staniszkis, 1989). The commanders of the centrally-planned economy did not encourage enterprises to be autonomous nor did they advocate management on principles of the enterprises' effectiveness, setting goals and competition (*cf.* Obłój, 1986). The main ideologic statement, on which the whole economy was based, was the pursuit of maximal

satisfaction of the needs of the whole society. Economic planning sought to reach an equilibrium between the production of consumption- and of production-goods, the eminent socialist economist Kalecki (1982) claimed. The central plan should introduce a 'centrally organized, full public control over the banking and finance system, investments and foreign trade, and—if it is possible—display the distribution of all basic raw materials and products' (Kalecki, 1982, p. 78). The functioning of enterprises in a centrally-planned economy had to be fully coordinated and managed by the institution of economic planning.

Under these circumstances, centralization of the economy was an obvious consequence. A persistent merger of state-owned enterprises to giant monopolies followed. In the DDR, it led to the creation of the famous *kombinats*; in other countries of the eastern block, similar organizations emerged.

The role of the individual enterprise was highly limited by the central plan. It had to achieve ratios of a changing nature; tasks were determined by some superior authority. The manager's role was highly restricted. The Polish manager did not set goals, plan, motivate, organize, nor control in the words' proper sense (Obłój, 1986; Sarapata, 1992)<sup>4</sup>. The enterprise was not the owner of its assets; it had no control over its organizational structure. The manager's role was solving immediate problems, similar to a fireman who has to put out fires instantly (Obłój, 1986). The enterprises seemed to be copies of each other, tiny elements of a big mechanism (*cf.* Czarniawska-Joerges, 1986; Kostera and Wicha, 1993). A prominent textbook of the period, Kiezun (1978), explicitly illustrated this by a chart where the directors of enterprises were depicted as direct subordinates of 'industrial' directors<sup>5</sup>, who, in turn, were shown as subordinates of the Minister. The imposed organizational rules were characterized by a high degree of homogeneity, with most of the regulations grounded upon a higher level of bureaucratic roles (Obłój, 1986). Organizational structures were strictly controlled by the authorities (Mreła, 1983). The bureaucratic, centralized structures and rules were appealing to the central authorities because of the focus on production in a producer's market (uncertainty associated with production, high certainty associated with sales) and the facilitation of central control of such uniform, centralized organizations (Obłój and Kostera, 1993). In a strictly regulated environment where all important goals were imposed by the central plan (and the communist party<sup>6</sup>), the role of the manager as strategy originator was limited (Obłój and Kostera, 1993)<sup>7</sup>. This was diagnosed and criticized by, among others, the reformist socialist economist Lipinski who postulated a more explicit focus on the environment and particularly on technology and the market (1981, pp. 324–329). The system survived criticisms and the 'centrally-planned strategies' continued to exist until the communist system fell in 1989 (*cf.* e.g. Koźmiński, 1985; Koźmiński and Obłój, 1989; Obłój and Kostera, 1993). However, Wawrzyniak (1985) described the Polish managers in his study as using informal strategies of a defensive

<sup>4</sup> Neither does the western manager, as e.g. Furusten (1992) points out. We believe, however, that the eastern manager's autonomy was even more limited, as the enterprises they managed were but a part of a huge centralized politico-economic system (*cf.* Wicha and Kostera, 1993).

<sup>5</sup> 'Industrial corporations', *zjednoczenia*, were introduced in Poland during the 70s, and were a kind of mega-enterprise, grouping state-owned enterprises of the same industry.

<sup>6</sup> W. Kiezun writes on the direct and immediate impact of the communist party on the manager's work (1978, pp. 160–163). It contains the following areas: creating plans for the macro-organizations' development; motivating (in the societal sphere); control of realization of plans by individual enterprises; solving social problems and conflicts; appointing managers.

<sup>7</sup> Wieckowski (1983) in the chapter 'Strategia przedsiębiorstw przemysłowych (Strategy of industrial enterprises)' enumerates a number of factors that influence strategy formulation by the manager of an industrial enterprise, both for a consumption goods producer and an industrial goods producer. Most of these factors are of an external nature, i.e. the manager has little or no influence on them, and centrally imposed objectives are named among them. Kiezun states that the role of strategy formulator belongs to the communist party, not the manager (1978, pp. 160–161).

nature that were aimed to protect them from excessive demands by the authorities, workers, and consumers to secure the essential input of supply, etc.

The manager was an administrator; his/her task was to perform not to create<sup>8</sup>. As one of our interviewees, an ex-manager of a state-owned enterprise, put it: 'The manager's task was to see to it that decisions made "above" were implemented properly [. . .], the plan was most important of all [. . .] Having ideas was something you could do in your free time [. . .], it was not professional.' The quoted manager was 'a person with ideas' who was interested in western management theory and practice long before 1989. As he told us, he could develop these interests outside of his normal responsibilities, e.g. by writing articles for the industrial press. He claimed that this 'hobby' was not very useful for his job as manager. His colleagues considered his interests precisely as a hobby (such as collection of stamps) not related directly to the job. This point of view was confirmed by others we interviewed who worked as managers before 1989. Thus, the managerial role was characterized by conventionality rather than imaginativity.

### *Professional standards*

#### **Educational standards**

Professional education was not a requirement for the communist manager. Kiezun criticized the emergence of an 'educated class' of managers-technocrats in western capitalist societies. These technocrats are there to 'rule the masses', to 'impose decisions on them' (Kiezun, 1978, pp. 169–172). Sarapata (1992) pointed out that there was a fear of the emergence of a managerial elite in communist controlled Poland and this is why managerial education was not promoted. Even the reformist economist Lipinski (1981) claimed that higher education was not a necessary standard for the manager, who instead should be a person with appropriate talents such as initiative. The practice of everyday life under communism also points at a moderate inclination toward developing management education. For many years, only one school of management existed (founded in the mid-seventies as a part of the Warsaw University). A majority of Polish higher-level managers were engineers (Obłój and Kostera, 1993; Obłój, 1986), and as the older managers, remembering well the communist past, say themselves, they often had to go through ideologic schooling in the communist party's régime. Education in management was not necessary, and the interviewed managers tended to agree that it, indeed, was not.

#### **Ethical standards**

Management was no superstar career. Our respondents pointed out that managers should not 'make too much noise', not be 'too visible' nor overzealous. 'Those who are too visible end up bad' was a maxim popular among communist managers. Indeed, in times of political crises preceding the change of the ruling elite from one coterie to another, public frustration was often provisionally tempered by letting 'a few heads fall down'. By staging a 'show of punishing the

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<sup>8</sup> ' . . . the manager of a given enterprise was greatly restricted by the regulations and directives he received, he had a very small margin of freedom in choosing products to be turned out, in choosing subcontractors, in choosing customers, in fixing prices, in fixing the remuneration of the employees, and in selecting his personnel. His main duties consisted in carrying out 100 per cent of the imposed production plan, in urging the personnel to work, in enforcing labor discipline, in enforcing the obedience of the personnel (the *de facto* prohibition to strike), in thwarting conflicts and dissatisfaction, in bringing up the personnel in the socialist spirit, in concern for socialist property, in a socialist attitude toward work, in socialist labor competition, etc.' (Sarapata, 1992, p. 106).

guilty of the crisis', well-known people then could be associated with the system (but *not* belong to the immediate ruling elite). Often, it was the 'too visible' managers that met this fate.

In order to ensure survival for the company, Polish communist managers played various games with the authorities, the party and the secret police, who had considerable power over the enterprises. The games were political negotiations including formation of coalitions aimed at maximization of power (Kostera and Wicha, 1993). Playing these games successfully without making him/herself vulnerable nor his/her company and employees was considered the most important quality of the former professional role of the manager, and also a kind of virtue:

It was endless meetings. The Ministries, party people, officials from all possible places, you were just driving around and talking to all of them. If you were smart, you knew how to do it—it was a game [. . .] Sometimes being a manager was a link in one's political career—or the other way around. You became a manager for your political virtues, as, for example being a good party secretary on some local level. You could also be 'promoted' to a high post within the party bureaucracy from the one of a manager. It was a natural link. [. . .] Anyway, if you 'just' wanted to manage your enterprise, you had to be engaged in all possible political activities, and I mean, really busy with it.

Preferably, the manager should play the games in such a way that did not mean 'loss of face', such as by elegant avoidance and not letting 'them' (the secret police, the party officials) 'get him/her' or get control over the manager. The Polish managers did, however, not exclude from their company nor totally condemn somebody who got involved with the secret police or even reported on his/her colleagues. This was regarded a dishonor but not a mortal sin, one of our interviewees affirmed. The managers were not supposed to 'flirt' with the illegal opposition as one of our informants put it. According to our interlocutors, the manager should be 'reasonable', 'not lose his/her face', not be a 'kamikaze', and his/her ambitions should be moderate. This was also true of the company: it should not be too concerned about its growth, image and visibility.

The plan was not only a centrally imposed task but also an argument used by managers in their games:

Plan fulfilment was a powerful argument. It silenced the officials. You explained to them what your 'quotas' were, in relation to the plan, in relation to previous periods. You talked about threats and causes of this or that—that was clearly our domain in all these discussions.

The games were part of the managerial role but were also a necessity: managers had to play for more power if they wanted their companies to survive and perhaps also to grow (Kostera and Wicha, 1994).

While denied any real impact on the selection of employees, Polish managers tended to adopt an autocratic style of management that alienated employees (Sarapata, 1992). Consequently, an 'us-them' organizational culture developed, undermining organizational effectiveness and aggravating the already low morale and poor company identification (Kostera, 1994).

Polish managers avoided risk, responsibility, and decision-making, and adopted, particularly towards the end of the communist era, a *laissez-faire* attitude: *let's wait and see* (Oblój and Kostera, 1993). This attitude was even considered a virtue by their peers, as one of our informants put it:

It's wise to wait, not to act hastily, be prudent. A manager should be prudent, because this [attitude] serves him well. The young businessmen, the 'new generation' should learn humility.

As Kiezun explained, the manager had to observe the needs and requirements of different groups and institutions, among them the local communist party organization, the central bureau of the party, workers' councils, etc. His/her role was to serve not to act like a 'dignitary' (1978, pp. 156–160). Innovative thinking was not considered a virtue; the central plan represented the 'ultimate rationality'. The plan even 'anticipated' innovations as it contained details about where and how many innovations will be originated and launched<sup>9</sup>.

Socialist central planning had the aim of full utilization of society's total production capacity to benefit the whole society (Kalecki, 1982, pp. 75–76). This would replace the motive of individual (and parasitic) profit with the noble motive of societal welfare (Lipinski, 1981, pp. 269–438). The social responsibility of the communist manager was, then, very broadly defined as related to the society as a whole. Individuality was banned; initiative and stressing of one's own position was not popular. Managers were not to provide 'individualistic gains' for their enterprises but to subject themselves to the 'needs of the society'.

### *Self-image*

Managers, trying to protect their and their companies' integrity, sought often to 'buy' a certain amount of independence by making the 'right' declarations at the 'right' moments, and developing an informal old-fellows network, preferably with high party-officials as powerful mentors (Obłój and Kostera, forthcoming). The professional role contained a high degree of hypocrisy: declaring loyalty to the communist party and commitment to the system without really thinking so was an important element of the manager's career. Another important aspect of the role was 'knowing the right people'; this was also how managers liked to see themselves, 'people with connections', we were told by our respondents. These insincere declarations and personal networks were tools for accomplishing the most important, informal aim of Polish managers: assuring that the central plans for their companies were minimal so that it would be easy to accomplish and not exceed them. This was needed to gain extra financial and material means for social programs, bonuses for employees (sometimes more attractive than the usual pay), foreign travels, etc. The manager who was able to achieve this was viewed by his colleagues (and employees) as a *good manager*, our informants affirmed. One of the managers we spoke to explained that:

what we really did was see that our 'own' people were satisfied: that they had somewhere to live, lemons and sausage before Christmas, toilet paper, vacation for the children, and a trip abroad for the 'better' ones, from time to time. . . .

As we can see, the communist manager's self-image focused on the ability to play games in order to gain basic material benefits for employees.

## **The role of the Polish manager of today<sup>10</sup>**

To find out how the attributes of the professional role of Polish managers may be changing, we carried out a preliminary study concerning the image of the managerial profession seen from 'the

<sup>9</sup> On the communist idea about rationalization, see e.g. Bauer (1972).

<sup>10</sup> We would like to thank the managers from Radio Zet and Huta Warszawa and others, who preferred to stay anonymous, for their kind cooperation and contribution to our study.



inside', i.e. from the point of view of Polish managers. This study focuses on the attributes of the task-elements and of the code of ethics directed toward managers from inside the business community (managers) (see Appendix). Our prime interest was to establish if (and in what way) the answers of our respondents would differ from what we knew from the literature and interviews about the past role of Polish managers.

It should be noted that we all rationalize our narratives about ourselves in order to make them acceptable. The managers whom we interviewed and who answered the questionnaire obviously engaged in this kind of rationalization. They wanted to make their stories acceptable in their own, our, and 'the general public's' eyes. We compared their statements with our own experience as management consultants and the literature, and tried to make a comprehensible picture of these rationalizations: how much of what the managers say is enacted by them ('substantial') and how much is just declared ('slogans'). Generally, we realized that our informants were less inclined to use slogans while speaking of the past. The managers we spoke to about how it used to be were all presently either self-employed, retired, or occupying high posts within foreign enterprises; this suggests that they were rather independent. Their position within their organizations was, in our opinion, 'safe'. They could 'afford' sincerity more than those who currently fight for an acceptable image of themselves. Moreover, the interviews were conducted to assure confidence, with just two people present, the interviewer being a researcher interested in communist management<sup>11</sup>. Questionnaires are more impersonal and can be read by many others. The respondent does not know by whom. The permanence of the written word makes people more acutely inclined to rationalize their narratives. That is why we followed up some of the responses to the questionnaire by a more personal interview.

### *New tasks*

As for the task-related elements of the managerial role, they are becoming increasingly similar to those of the western manager working in a market economy, say the experts and academics (cf. Koźmiński and Obłój, 1990; Connor and Płoszajski, 1992; Płoszajski, 1991). We wanted to learn about managers' own definition of their job, so we asked our respondents what a manager is supposed to do. Most of our respondents answered (in order of importance): strategy formulation, motivating employees, organizing teams, and supervision. Fewer pointed at organizing tasks, and a tiny minority named the carrying out of tasks, analyzing effects, company representation, and caring for the company.

We believe it is significant that so many of our respondents stressed strategy formulation as the manager's task. As we have seen, communist managers did not engage in strategy formulation officially. The current attention given to this task might be a way for our respondents to emphasize that they represent a new 'capitalist generation' of managers. Simultaneously, strategy formulation has gained importance in the contemporary Polish enterprise, as each firm has now acquired considerable autonomy and no central plan is determining its fate.

Motivation and the organization of teams were also new elements of the managerial role. Direct supervision, carrying out tasks, and analyzing effects of work were perhaps more protruding tasks under communism than any of the ones listed above. Company representation

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<sup>11</sup> The 'old boys network' perhaps worked here to our advantage. Some of the informants knew each other and we are aware that they contacted each other at least in some cases, referring to the researcher as a person who was 'OK': not working for any ministry, not with any political party, not a journalist—in other words, as someone who was not threatening.

and caring for the company probably reflected the desire to be a symbol for the 'new', now autonomous organization, which no longer is under several layers of bureaucratic control (see Table 2).

### *New professional standards*

#### **Education**

We queried about what makes a manager: education, experience, or talent? The distribution of answers was even, favoring slightly education. Together, education and experience were considered as the most important in almost two-thirds of the answers. It seems that our respondents now believe in formal education, a conclusion supported by experts. Kwiatkowski and Koźmiński (1992) pointed out that there is currently a large group of well-educated management professors in Poland and quite a few institutions offering high quality education. Several private business schools are being created as a part of already existing institutions or as new, independent units (Kwiatkowski and Koźmiński, 1992) (see Table 2). However, education, and particularly economic education, is by no means a 'cold' and technical issue. Genell and Kostera (1994) pointed out that the romantic myth of university and education, having its roots in history, is still strong in Poland. During the many and long periods of foreign occupation, all non-official education was driven underground, where the tradition of the 'Flying University' grew strong. After 1989, freedom of speech was re-introduced but the mythical image of education endures. This is particularly true among academic teachers in business administration. Therefore, Genell and Kostera used the metaphor of Flying University in their description of the functioning of a contemporary Polish faculty of management.

#### **Ethics**

Answering the question about desirable managerial qualities, most of our respondents stressed the importance of resistance to stress and the ability to cooperate with others. Many noted that the ability to carry our ingenious ideas, creativity, broad competence, and high personal moral standards were also important. Our respondents tended to give less credit to honesty and the need for achievement.

The high stress of managerial jobs has received much attention in the Polish media. It has also been claimed (by the media) that the new 'capitalist' manager should be a person 'with nerves of steel'. This romantic vision probably appealed to many of our interlocutors.

What we consider particularly important was the tendency to answer that the ability to cooperate was crucial for the manager. This might be a new point of view among Polish managers, who were, under communism, used to the 'war metaphor' (*cf.* Weick, 1979), elaborated by eminent management theoreticians, such as Zieleniewski (1976a,b) and Kiezun (1977), stressing the importance of keeping the 'hierarchical order', 'chain of command', 'linear structures', etc.

The answers stressing creativity as an important managerial quality might reflect the difficulties that Polish managers meet during times of change. Finding ingenious solutions, the ability to think creatively, can be a question of 'life and death' for the enterprise when the rules change and the environment evolves beyond the individual's 'normal' perception and learning pace. This, and also the answer that 'high personal moral standards' were important, corresponds, in our opinion, to the new romantic myth of the 'capitalist manager', who should be someone 'out of the ordinary'. Note that this role is dissimilar to the one of 'individuality-

repression' dominating under communism. As in the case of education, the new myth is rooted in past myths, deriving from before the communist era. The romantic hero was important and popular in Polish literature: giving people hope and an attractive collective identity, as in Henryk Sienkiewicz's ever popular novels<sup>12</sup>. It is, again, a re-writing of the myth: the new hero is not a warrior, not even a man of gentry, but a manager (yet still—a man).

Our respondents' weak attention to 'honesty' is, in our belief, also interesting. The Polish media often criticize the 'new middle class' for lack of honesty and, perhaps as often, speak about the 'necessary price to pay for the transition to capitalism' which is to lower ethical standards for business people. It is repeated that 'in order to make your first million dollars you have to inherit it or steal it—only later you can go ahead being honest'. This attitude corresponds with the common belief that 'rich (business-)people are not honest', reflected in the results of Boski's survey (1991).

As described previously, need achievement of managers was not regarded as a virtue in Polish communist society. The weak interest of our respondents in this need might reflect this still strong societal value. This answer is, however, not particularly compatible with the individualistic myth described above. Few respondents, having answered that managers should be people 'out of the ordinary' (high personal moral standards, resistant to stress, etc.), believed that they should have a strong need for achievement. Interestingly, the two managers who thought that 'honesty' was important also rated need for achievement highly.

A majority of our respondents agreed that the essence of their relationship to their subordinates could be communicated through the slogan: 'decent work deserves decent pay'. Considerably less expressed their attitude through the phrase: 'people get paid for the work they perform—therefore they should perform the work'. A minority of respondents thought that the manager's responsibility was to ensure proper conditions for the people to perform their job well. Only one person thought that people were lazy and should be supervised constantly.

Our respondents represented what we call the 'civilized version' of Theory X. They were not directly pessimistic about their subordinates, as the communist managers often were, but nevertheless they believed that people should be paid in order to get motivated. Few noticed their own responsibility for achieving motivation, the one of 'ensuring work conditions', or in other words, 'leadership'.

We were interested in the managers' view on their social responsibility. We asked if a manager should do something for his/her country. This was an open question and the answers varied. Some of our respondents indicated that this question was a surprise; they had not reflected on it much before<sup>13</sup>. Yet a majority answered yes.

Many of the respondents explained that managers should grant money for needy social groups, cooperate with local authorities, and pay taxes. Fewer named sponsoring culture, protecting actively the biosphere, and being honest and reliable business people as moral responsibilities to society. Some also mentioned participating in fair competition and not taking part in any suspect businesses as moral imperatives.

Managers from Radio Zet, a private FM radio station recently established, spoke about sponsoring culture but also of just paying taxes as examples of a manager's moral duties. Respondents from another company pointed out that not engaging in shady businesses was an obligation as was supporting local and country-wide initiatives and contributing to the development of the region. Managers from a service company talked about developing fair

<sup>12</sup> These novels were written under Russian occupation at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries.

<sup>13</sup> The reaction would have probably been a different one now (1994). The mass media has interested itself considerably in the topic the last time and also politicians have begun to use the rhetoric of 'ethics in business'.

competition and creating a positive image of the country. Respondents from a consumer goods corporation emphasized increasing national wealth, supporting needy ones within the community, and supporting financially innovative local initiatives as moral duties. Members from an industrial goods business answered that managers should take care of the natural environment in the first place. Managers from another consumer products enterprise identified a moral duty to cooperate with local authorities on ecological, infrastructural, and other issues. The managers of Huta Warszawa<sup>14</sup> answered that whatever managers do, they should keep society's good in mind and fulfil their obligations to the state; they should also support local social initiatives and properly manage the company.

These positive but surprised reactions to the question on corporate responsibility indicate that the managers were not prepared for this kind of question. The ethical language was probably not the kind of language that they were ready to use. However, they saw social responsibility problems as important and were willing to discuss them. We had the impression that they were glad to discuss managerial ethics and felt 'more professional' because they did so.

The answers provided to the social responsibility question indicate that the charity model was prevailing among our respondents. They talked of support to those in need and of paying taxes (and let the authorities take care of the rest—*laissez-faire* revisited). Another tone is present in the answers referring to the ideals of 'the free market': corporate responsibility is about participating in fair competition and avoiding shady deals. This kind of Milton Friedman rhetoric is becoming increasingly popular among Polish business people as an antithesis to communist ideology. Many Polish managers think that 'capitalism' equals one version of market economy only, the one being an 'antithesis' of 'socialism', i.e. its Friedman version. Instead of the 'broad societal' frame of reference, dominating under communism, many managers advocate a 'narrow definition' of social responsibility for the enterprise. A majority of our respondents was, however, open to a broad notion of social responsibility, even though redefined: not political (*fitting in the political goals for society embodied in the central plan*) but more economical and social (see Table 2).

It is also interesting to note that many respondents mentioned 'paying taxes' as a moral responsibility. First, it is compulsory and cheating is sanctioned legally. Paying taxes is then hardly a virtue; it is rather a rational act of self-interest. Second, Polish business people are notorious tax evaders, as presented by the mass media. It is hard to say whether those who evade taxes also speak of tax paying as a moral responsibility. The fact remains, however, that the image of managers and business people differs again in the eyes of the actors themselves and the so-called general public.

In a private communication with one of the respondents, he explained to us that he was 'overall a fan of modern management' but that it was foolish to 'get too much involved'. The wisest thing a manager of a big enterprise could do was 'wait and see'. This message, even if coming only from one person, made us somewhat more skeptical about the declarations of our respondents. They might have adopted a well-learned strategy from the past: use the 'right' words, and wait and see.

### *New self-image*

To say anything about Polish managers' 'new self-image', we have to use the results of yet another small study. One of the authors of this paper carried out a study among Polish MBA

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<sup>14</sup> Warsaw colored metals works.

Table 2. Attributes of the Polish manager's social role: before 1989 and after

	Task-related elements	Standards		Self-image
		Educational	Ethical	
Before 1989	Administration/ conventionality 'Fireman' solving urgent problems 'To serve'	Moderate interest in managerial competence Technical skills	Modesty Playing (political) games Autocratic style of management Responsibility before the whole society 'Wait and see'	Informal networking Hypocrisy 'People with connections' Take care of employees' (material) needs = 'The Political Gamesperson'
After 1989	Strategy formulation/ creativity Motivation Administration	Managerial education Experience	Resistance to stress Cooperation with other people Creativity 'Civilized' Theory X Laissez-faire capitalism 'Wait-and-see'	Honesty Professionalism = 'The Professional'

students<sup>15</sup>. The respondents believed that 'a good manager should be a professional' and that one should be proud of 'joining the club' of professional managers. They were asked to list the qualities that they considered most important for a good manager. The answers varied but there were some common tendencies. The list of desired managerial virtues contained such statements as: 'decent treatment of employees', 'be fair', 'be honest', 'pay your taxes', 'professionalism', 'openness', 'loyalty toward the company', 'competence', 'knowledge', 'respect for other people'. The list also contained such norms and values as: 'decent outlook', 'good manners', 'punctuality', 'style', 'innovativeness', 'creativity', 'sensitivity to social problems'. In further discussion with the students, they tended to summarize the lists in terms of 'solidness', 'professional manners' and 'competence'. The manager should be a 'high class' person, representing her/his company and her/his country well.

Today, Polish managers' self-image focuses on different elements of the managerial role—the educational and ethical standards. Managers emphasize competence and professionalism, and a code of ethics. It is worth noting that honesty was more valued in this MBA study than in the study reported here. This may result from the fact that respondents were students in a Polish-American MBA program, considered 'high class' and 'elite' (candidates for the program had to have excellent grades and to pass a tough exam), rather than practicing managers.

Table 2 summarizes the findings of our study. It shows how the task-relevant elements, the standards, and the self-image of the Polish manager's role have changed during the transition from a centrally-planned to a market economy.

<sup>15</sup> International Management Center, Warsaw University MBA program; survey conducted in 1993; 36 students participated.

## Conclusion

While this preliminary study is limited, it illustrates quite well current tendencies in the social role of Polish managers. The data indicate that the attributes of the Polish managerial role seem to be changing. The managerial job in Poland is undergoing 'professionalization', understood as raising the need for specialist education. It is also refocusing on different tasks. Whether this new role is becoming similar to that of western managers remains to be answered through more systematic research. This study suggests that the new Polish role is inspired to a certain degree by western management. However, rather than learning about 'how it really is like to be a western manager', Polish managers tend to adopt an idealized picture of western management. They become 'what they believe that the westerners are' (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1993); they adopt the 'new language' fast but superficially. This reminds us of the adoption of 'fashionable' slogans during the authorities' (the Communist Party's) subsequent attempts at management of meaning in Poland.

The Polish managers in our study see themselves as strategy-originators, responsible for motivation and organization. Simultaneously, research shows that the manager is more of a 'puppet' than a 'conductor of an orchestra' (Furusten, 1992). This observation that managers are dependent on various situations and groups and are not necessarily rational in their decision-making is equally valid about western (e.g. Kotter, 1982; Mintzberg, 1973; March and Simon, 1958; Cohen, March and Olsen, 1972; Brunsson, 1989) and eastern managers (e.g. Oblój, 1986; Oblój and Kostera, 1993; Kostera and Wicha, 1993). The answers seem to indicate that the myth of management (Furusten, 1992) is as much alive in Poland as in the west.

The media has considerable impact on our respondents' declarations about the creation of the new romantic myth of management. The questionnaire contained items about the style of management, which turned out to be autocratic and a 'civilized version of Theory X'. The autocratic version of personnel management is transmitted by the media, particularly TV and especially American films (*Dynasty*, *Manhattan*, *Generations*, etc). Through these films, a romantic version of capitalism and management is communicated and this corresponds well with the image of 'manager-hero with nerves of steel' which seems to be attractive to Polish managers.

The key point to emphasize is that managerial roles develop in two parallel tracks which seem to be independent of each other. The first is the mythical one, and it corresponds to the use of the 'right' slogans. This mythical role has changed considerably in Poland. It is entirely different from the communist era, even if the myth it is now based upon is rooted in the quite so distant past. The second track is the 'substantial' or enacted role and it can best be described by the words: 'wait and see'. This enacted role is very much the same as it has been during the communist era.

The common western assumption that the ex-eastern block is 'changing' and 'becoming like the west' is treacherous. In a study of the organizational culture of state-owned enterprises that are presently privatized in Poland, Oblój and Kostera (1993) argued that the change in culture is much more superficial than expected by the advocates for privatization. The same point was made by Kostera and Wicha (1993) who argued that the change involves more the surface of the organizational cultures of state-owned enterprises than the 'real feelings' of the involved people. These firms adopted the new terminology—they were used to 'new waves', but they perceived the world the way they did before: as hostile and manipulating forces to which one has seemingly to 'adapt' in order to be left in peace.

Clearly, more systematic research on Polish managers' professional role would be welcome in order to discover whether it is a new role or basically the same role performed in a different scenery.

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## Appendix

We sent out 62 questionnaires to 20 Polish companies that are highly involved in the transition process. The selection was based on the Warsaw Stock Exchange listings and the Privatization Ministry's materials; we chose arbitrarily some well-known (and in most cases also big) companies. All of the selected companies were, during the study, intensively involved in the current Polish systemic change—the transition from central-planning to market economy had important consequences for all our respondents. Some were undergoing privatization, some already had become private, and some were created as private ventures after 1989. We received an answer from 35 managers from 12 of the companies. All respondents, except for managers of Huta Warszawa and Radio Zet, asked us to provide entire anonymity. Of the respondents, one was a state-owned company, intending to undergo privatization (by the time the paper is published, it will have become private), one was a private venture from the beginning, and the rest were undergoing privatization (they were all state-owned before 1989). We received spontaneous feedback from some of the respondents (phone-calls).

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June 4th, 1989 is the symbolic date for the systemic shift in Poland (the date of the first free elections since the beginning of World War II).



The questionnaire contained closed and open questions, of which only a part is being discussed in the current paper. The questions taken up in the paper are the following:

- (1) Which qualities should a manager have?
  - a. resistance to stress
  - b. broad competence
  - c. ability to cooperate with others
  - d. honesty
  - e. ability to carry out ingenious ideas
  - f. creativity
  - g. be a good listener
  - h. need for achievement
  - i. personal high moral standards
  - j. other. . . .
  
- (2) Which should be a manager's responsibilities toward his company and subordinates?
  - a. motivating
  - b. strategy formulation
  - c. carrying out tasks
  - d. organizing teams
  - e. organizing tasks
  - f. supervising
  - h. other. . . .
  
- (3) Please distribute a pool of 100 points between the following three categories according to your opinion about what is most important to make a good manager
  - a. talent
  - b. professional education
  - c. experience
  
- (4) Should a contemporary manager do something for the country s/he lives in and the society he is a part of?

YES	NO
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If you have answered YES, please explain what he should do?  
.....
  
- (6) Which of the following answers represent best your opinion of your subordinates?
  - a. a human being is lazy by nature and should be constantly supervised
  - b. people get paid—so they ought to perform
  - c. people need me in order to ensure them best possible working conditions
  - d. decent work deserves decent pay
  - e. . . . .