

# **What can Western Management Offer Russian Social Work?**

by **Kate Gilbert**

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## Abstract

This paper contributes to the debate on the process and the efficacy of Western management 'knowledge' transfer by casting light on the ways in which it has had an impact on the largely neglected area of public service and public administration. The study from which the paper derives took place in 1997 and 1998 in two social services departments in regions south of Moscow, and in the Ministry of Labour and Social Development (formerly Social Protection) in Moscow. The author is a British management academic acting as a consultant to the development of social work management on a recent Tacis project. The paper is an ethnographic, participant observer account of working with Russian social workers, social work managers, and heads of service.

In Russia, the institutions for protection of the most vulnerable groups in the population, and the legislative frameworks for such institutions (the 'social safety net'), are being radically re-drawn, in efforts to forestall the direst social consequences of a rapid shift to the market. Social work as a profession is being shaped and defined within this context, and an infrastructure to manage and resource it is being gradually and painfully developed by its leaders, often *in extremis*. Social services managers are struggling with a gargantuan task of reconciling the contradiction between vastly expanding public expectations and rapidly dwindling resources. Within this contradiction, Western influences, traditional Russian values and the harsh reality of the present, meet, collide and confront each other. Inherent tensions lead to the psychological phenomenon known as 'splitting' - the separating out of negative emotions or feelings judged unhelpful, and their projection onto other groups. Using an ethnographic approach to a small number of recent consultancy episodes, the author contends that only those Western management approaches which can accommodate a diverse range of ideological positions will be helpful, because they will be recognised in terms of current realities and comprehended as consistent with dominant values. No single set of values can yet be said to be dominant. The ensuing result is that a focus on developing practice in social work delivery is seen to be more relevant, and less problematical, than the transfer of new approaches to service management.

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# What Can Western Management Offer Russian Social Work?

## Introduction: facing up to the social impact of 'reform'

Debate on the transfer of Western management 'knowledge' and techniques to the Russian Federation, generated both in the West and in Russia, tends to focus on developments, changes and initiatives on the commercial and industrial sectors (Dyker, 1992; Fey, 1995; Holden *et al*, 1997; Frydman *et al*, 1993). This paper contributes to the debate on the process and the efficacy of such transfer (whatever the rationale and criteria) by examining the ways in which such knowledge transfer has had an impact on the largely neglected area of public service and public administration. In Russia, the institutions for protection of the most vulnerable groups in the population, and the legislative frameworks for such institutions (the 'social safety net'), are being radically re-drawn, in efforts to forestall the direst social consequences of a rapid (and traumatic) shift to the market. When mainstream literature considers such consequences, such as the threat of massive structural unemployment, extreme poverty and ill-health, and the marginalisation of the old and infirm, it has been generally to nod in their direction and regret them as an unfortunate but necessary feature of a transition to an ultimately better reality. Recently, however, Tacis (1997) has shifted its funding emphasis from enterprise restructuring to social programmes, signalling recognition that the problem cannot be continuously consigned to 'Any Other Business' on the technical co-operation agenda.

Critical management studies offer a framework for reflexive analysis of these transitional processes. Alvesson and Willmott (1996) refer to adopting a critique of "the worst excesses of capitalist development". This phrasing might be taken to imply a suggestion that alternative (socialist, communist) forms of development would not necessarily be so oppressive. Soviet communism, through its Leninist and Stalinist guises, was, as we know, oppressive in many of its effects on the lives of the subjects of that empire. However, oppression manifested itself in a collective rather than an individualistic form. The entire population, other than a small elite, was deprived of the fruits of their labour in the form of a standard of material living commensurate with the wealth of the country. The collapse of communism and the failure of 'reform' to deliver a fully-formed mature liberal democratic state on the Western model means that this diffused and collective oppression is now converted to suffering, experienced at an individual level and at the level of the family.

It is in this context that an element of Western assistance funding has been targeted towards the development of a system of social services for the most vulnerable sections of the population of the Russian Federation. As a consultant in the Training Team of a two year Tacis (EU Technical Assistance) project under the auspices of the Russian Ministry of Labour and Social Development, I worked on a series of assignments in Russia to provide management development and trainer training to Ministry officials and senior academics in Moscow, and officials of the Social Protection Departments of two pilot regions in southern Russia. This paper is a critical reflection on aspects of that experience, both in terms of an attempted evaluation of the effectiveness and relevance of Western assistance to the developments and changes that are taking place within that context, and also in terms of a consideration of the role of the Western 'expert' in the attempted transfer of knowledge, 'know-how' or management practice (Gilbert, 1998).

As with most papers, this one has gone through a number of metamorphoses. While some of my former attempts at scholarly writing have involved refinement of argument and dressing up data in ever more elaborate theoretical layers, this one has been more a successive shedding of layers of skin. While analysing documents and notes from a range of sources, collected in the course of the project, using a case study approach (Yin, 1994), I was forcibly struck by the contrast in the content and styles of expression between documents produced for 'official' consumption, such as consultant reports of activities, and accounts of lived experience by the same authors describing the same activities or

incidents. In particular, I seemed to have taken on a dual identity. In reports, I presented a world which, if somewhat disordered and rudimentary in its organisational forms, was peopled by dispassionate, ordered, rational actors (including myself) engaged in a progressive and rational project to improve systems and processes, in the interests of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. Yet according to my observational records and diary notes, I inhabited a looking-glass world in which nothing was as it at first appeared. In it we, Russians and Westerners alike, were struggling against chaos, trying to keep our organisations and ourselves from falling apart, and occasionally allowing others glimpses of our panic and distress. This suggested the idea of juxtaposing these alternative representations, in order to examine the nature of this dualism, whether it offers any insights into apparently limited impact of the management development component on the outcomes of the project.

The paper thus firstly provides some information for the reader about the development of social services since the demise of the Soviet Union, within the context of a 'welfare mix' model. I go on to consider the knowledge transfer process in social services in general and social services management in particular, and explore the dualism mentioned above through the juxtaposition of official or formal reports and informal accounts of 'lived experience'. The tentative conclusion is that concepts of management are caught in a no-mans-land between; a) uncertainty and confusion about the nature of social services and the professional role of the social worker, and b) uncertainties about the direction to be taken by the state (fragmentary and weak) in developing a framework for a stable civil society. In this no-mans-land, populated largely by women, workers struggle to improve existing services, and to innovate. As one consultant put it; "There is tremendous energy and passion for development of new services.....Most of the Centres we visited were in the middle of alterations and it sometimes felt like one large building site." The emphasis settles inevitably on the operational level, on developing social work in Russia under the prevailing idea that when we all know what it is, maybe we can start to wonder about how to manage it.

In seeking to unpack the management development component of a project such as this, it is revealing to deconstruct its title and terms of reference. The title of the project (Assistance to the development of a system of social services for vulnerable groups, Russian Federation) set out its agenda and, by implication, also its ideology. Social services should exist in Russia. These services should be targeted towards 'vulnerable groups' and should work as a system. This system should operate in the Russian Federation (by implication to some degree at federal level - the main project beneficiary was the federal Ministry of Labour and Social Development). The terms of reference, drawn up in Brussels with the collaboration of the Ministry, were to assist the Ministry to improve and supplement the federal legislative framework of the 'social safety net' to mitigate the worst effects of the collapse of the command economy on those most vulnerable; the elderly, families with young children, and the disabled. Crucially, certain groups who could be classed as vulnerable are not included in this list: ex-offenders, substance abusers, homeless people, for example, are not classified within the terms of reference, conjuring up connotations of the 'deserving poor'. Those three categories included are addressed separately, as though to confirm a perception that the old and people with disabilities are to be treated as isolates rather than in a family context.

In some countries the concept of social services embraces both social care, i.e. the provision of specific services and facilities for people with special needs e.g. people with disabilities, vulnerable children, the homeless, etc. and social security i.e. a system of compensatory payments for people on low levels of income, such as pensioners. In the United Kingdom these two functions are separated. While there is not such a clear separation between these functions in Russia at the present time, there is in legislation a distinction between social care and social security. However, at the level of service delivery, calculations of entitlements to means-tested benefits are now the responsibility of social workers. This places a double burden on the social worker. Social work managers are simultaneously charged both with distributing (rationing and refusing) material benefits and providing services to individuals and families in a situation of socio-economic collapse. In one of the regions chosen as pilot sites, 50% of the population are classed as 'pensioners' i.e. dependent on state benefits. In the UK, the social worker is seen as a professional who works on behalf of the state to ameliorate some of

the human problems on the margins of an established and stable social order: in Russia the role of the social worker is as yet relatively undeveloped and little understood. The social worker tends to view herself as the person who is there to solve people's problems, the last refuge standing between unfortunate people and the abyss. This would be a severe mental and emotional burden at the best of times, likely to trigger acute anxieties. The Russian social worker, a member of a quasi-profession only officially recognised in 1991, and typically a female ex-engineer or scientist who has lost her former profession, is hardly well-prepared or well-equipped to cope with her own and others' expectations that she will *solve* problems, especially in the absence of other social structures and systems.

Winnicott (1947), in his work on the 'good enough' mother, recognised the resentment and self-denigration experienced by mothers of demanding and utterly dependent babies. Building on this concept, several writers (Menzies, 1960; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994) have identified similar reactions in members of the helping professions. Where such negative feelings are perceived as unacceptable, or unprofessional, they may lead to a splitting off of the negative emotion, which may be projected onto other groups in the form of blame. In current circumstances, many problems are insoluble, and the social worker can do little more than listen and absorb the fear and resentment of clients. This can then be internalised as severe anxiety and stress, and feelings of failure. Workers worry about how to communicate with clients, about how to manage the contradiction between professional objectivity and human sympathy, about how to say no to people in desperate need. They suffer from guilt at how little they can do, and ambivalence about their resentment at losing their former professions and material security. Western projects and consultants are importing knowledge based on the predicate that the 'welfare mix' will be spreading the burden and the strain. In reality, social work in Russia today represents an extension of woman's traditional caring role inside the home to the external community, that caring role being exercised in a vacuum created by the collapse of the state and the economy.

### The welfare mix

The functions of a system of social care are provision of care and support, protection, regulation, stimulation and care co-ordination, social control and social integration. All developed countries have a combination of ways in which the needs of the most vulnerable members of society are met, a combination commonly known as the 'welfare mix' (Anttonen & Sipila, 1996), which consists of :

- A. state provision met through general taxation;
- B. the voluntary or independent sector, ranging from self-help groups and unpaid volunteers to often large not-for-profit organisations;
- C. the commercial sector where care services are provided for profit which is distributed to members or owners
- D. the informal sector of family, friends and neighbours

The United Kingdom has seen a shift in recent years from a heavily State-supported system towards a 'liberal' market system, in which the mass of the population meet their needs for domiciliary or residential care through the operation of market-oriented organisations and financial institutions. The State picks up responsibility for residual means-tested provision for the most vulnerable. It could in fact be argued that the heyday of the Welfare State in Britain was in fact an aberration, and that the UK has returned to a more 'normal' pattern consistent with its culture. The liberal model is contrasted, on the one hand, with the universalist state-dominated social democratic model of Scandinavia; and on the other, with the family care model of Mediterranean countries such as Spain, Portugal and Italy. Germanic countries display a subsidiarity model, the family having a strong primary responsibility, supported by provision from the voluntary sector and limited services from the state (Anttonen and Sipila, 1996).

### The welfare mix in Russia

The very phrase 'welfare mix' carries connotations of variety and plenty, and so itself may have a distorting effect on perceptions. Although much has been written about Russian communitarianism as a long-term cultural dimension (Berdyayev, 1990; Vlachoutsicos & Lawrence, 1990; Holden *et al*, 1997), demographic and economic factors are clearly putting great strain on families. This is exacerbated by levels of stress from psychological adjustments to societal change, and the ongoing struggle for survival in the short to medium term. A recent opinion survey indicated that 86% of Muscovites could not recall one single good thing that happened in 1998, suggesting that stress is taking its toll across the population, and people will tend to concentrate their efforts on looking after themselves and their immediate families.

### **State sector**

The state sector is still regarded as the first port of call. Although paralysed by debt and producing inadequate legislation, the federal government can take some credit for having spearheaded the development of social work and social services on a federal basis, continuing a process which began during the perestroika period (Wiktorow, 1992; Shipitsina, 1998).

### **Voluntary or independent sector**

While it cannot be said to be flourishing, there are signs of development, in the absence of adequate state provision. The burgeoning of the voluntary sector seen in Hungary post-1989 (Munday & Lane, 1998) has not been experienced in Russia, although more self-help and self-advocacy groups are being established. These have tended to operate as lobbying groups at federal and regional level, rather than being service providers themselves. The religious revival, generating philanthropic organisations linked to western evangelical movements, has had a marginal impact in some large cities.

### **Commercial sector**

Beyond the provision of primary health care, we (not unexpectedly) saw very little evidence of the birth of a commercial social care system. Unlike the United States, where the social worker is an independent licensed practitioner who may advertise his or her services in the Yellow Pages, Russia has adopted the predominant European model of the social worker as employee of a governmental agency, managing a centre or caseload on behalf of that public body. It would seem highly unlikely that a significant commercial sector is set to develop in the near future, as the economy could not support it. The long-term prospects for growth of commercial social care, such as residential homes for the aged, will depend on where Russia eventually falls on the liberal-social democratic care continuum and the development of a reasonably affluent middle class.

## **Perspectives on the 'clients' of social services**

### **Disability**

In Russia people with disabilities are treated primarily with a medical approach; i.e. their physical impairments are seen as a medical rather than a social issue. The Russian term 'invalid' has been abandoned in other countries in Europe because of its connotations of someone who is of no value to society. The Russian environment, urban and rural, remains unadapted to the needs of people with mobility or sensory problems, and people with learning disabilities are rarely seen in public places.

The process of dealing with a disabled person is generally a process of segregation from the mainstream. Classification of disability, including registration, is made without reference to the preference of the individual. Once made, the decision is not usually reviewed. People with a minimal level of disability generally reside in long-term institutions, despite not requiring this level of care. Russian people with disabilities have not had, and continue without, the legislative assistance of equal opportunities policies at either federal or regional level. There is some evidence that self-advocacy organisations are beginning to develop among groups of people with disabilities, particularly the

young. Those few who have found ways to develop IT skills have found their way onto the Internet and are learning from organisations on the Web about rights for people with disabilities. It is arguable that the extent of a civil society can be measured by the extent to which people with special needs can integrate into mainstream life.

### **The elderly**

The plight of the elderly is one of the most pitiful aspects of the demise of the Soviet Union. The problem with the level and payment of pensions is well known. Less well-documented is the psychological effect of having the past wiped out. Many old people are eking out their final years in despair and isolation. For some, the best option is admission to a long-term institution because of homelessness or hunger. Thus, there are many in residential care who do not need to be there because of their physical or mental incapacity.

### **Children and families**

Like poverty, the maltreatment of children did not officially exist as a social problem in the Soviet Union (Wiktorow, 1992). The discovery of physical, mental, sexual abuse and neglect, coupled with a massive increase in child homelessness, has been a major shock. Such children are identified as vulnerable, and because of the established patterns of care being crisis intervention rather than prevention, intervention tends to mean institutionalisation. Short-term care solutions such as fostering are poorly developed.

### **Veterans**

War veterans enjoyed relative privileges in the Soviet system, benefiting from enhanced pension payments and allowances (Wiktorow, 1992). Now, however, it is apparent that the system of treating war veterans *en masse* as a population category, while culturally and historically understandable, is resulting in young disabled men, victims of the wars in Afghanistan and Chechenya, being cared for in centres which are basically geriatric institutions.

### **The rational/emotional split**

The role of management is to broker severely limited resources between these groups, to try to make resources go further through co-ordination, and to prevent the system from collapsing under the weight of demand. Into this situation comes the Western consultant. In spring of 1997, the EU project found Ministry staff to be suffering from extremely low morale, due to lack of funding for staff, lack of federal resources to develop and deliver services, and disappointment at statements coming from Ministers. Deputy Ministers responsible for formulating policy felt inadequate to the task and ill prepared. No support or education appeared to be available to them. A salary increase for staff, produced by decree, remained unpaid. The project also experienced lack of collaboration and rivalry between ministries, access to Ministries such as Education, Health and Home Affairs proving extremely difficult.

In September 1997 my colleagues and I from the UK, Belgium and Germany, arrived at last in the two regional experimental sites in the Tacis project "Developing a system of social services for vulnerable groups in the Russian Federation". The lead-in time had been long, the contract having been signed back in January, and the inception period had been protracted. This was one of the most ambitious and widely-scoped of the Tacis social welfare projects in Russia; there being four working teams, on services for the elderly, for children and families, and for people with disabilities, plus our team focusing on professional and management development. In the training team I had two strings to my bow; trainer training and management development. Each team was to work in the experimental sites developing innovative practice. In addition, some experts would also work at a Federal level with the Ministry of Labour and Social Development, giving advice on developing service standards and on drafting legislation. Expectations of the project and its consultants were immense as, in just over a

year, it was to produce a list of outputs ranging from development of model service delivery centres, through introduction of 'optimal monitoring systems', to overhaul of the curriculum for university preparation of the new generation of social workers. This overloading of expectations on the project can be interpreted as mirroring and projecting, through pressure from the Ministry and regions, the overloading of expectations on social workers and social services at the operational level.

During the following year, we were to make several visits to Samara and to Penza, the second experimental region, with a Russian partner from the Excellence in Qualifications Institute in Moscow. At first, our Russian partners expected that our knowledge and expertise would be imparted solely through the medium of lectures and seminars. That first three-week visit, dubbed 'consultancy', comprised fifteen days solid of presentations and seminars, punctuated by overnight train journeys. Possibly we were being worked like circus horses to show that Tacis would be getting (or was it giving?) value for money. Approximately half of the sessions were designed as management development and delivered to mixed groups of senior regional officials and service providers. As time went on, it became possible to work in a more process-oriented way with workers in the regions. While this was welcome, gradually the focus of the consultancy changed, at first almost imperceptibly, but finally substantially, away from management development to an almost exclusive emphasis on professional development for social workers and trainer training. Why was this? Initial seminars on management of social services had been well-attended and enthusiastically received, particularly in the regions.

Subsequent analysis and reflection reveals that, while the managerialist subject matter was on the surface uncontentious and unproblematic, there were strong emotional undercurrents within the situation which were being channelled away from the 'formal' consultancy arena of seminars and meetings, to be expressed elsewhere, particularly in the relationships within the consultant team and between the consultants and other parts of the project. Incipient conflicts surfaced in several critical incidents. These focused, for example, on the quality of accommodation, boundaries between work time and time for relaxation and privacy for consultants outside work time, as well as more technical issues such as giving one another feedback on how things had gone at the end of the day.

A typical example is presented below, with an extract from the report:

20 people attended the morning session. We had agreed, on the insistence of Russian colleagues, that the seminar should run with only a short break at lunchtime and an early finish, so as not to 'lose' the audience. However, when lunchtime came everybody left the room and went off to the canteen anyway. We continued with 12 after lunch, which we considered reasonably successful. Feedback confirmed that the material being presented was new to the audience and was giving them food for thought. In addition, an ambiance of openness and relative informality was created. There are some good young people in the Ministry.....It was encouraging to note that, despite the traditional Russian reluctance to speak in front of one's superiors during seminar sessions, outside sessions [they] were keen to ask questions of the consultants' team.

This seminar in the Ministry took place the day after the Western consultants met their Russian counterparts. The 'deep structure' of the text reveals anxiety and conflict on a number of levels. The issue of lunch had been a major point of contention the previous day. The Westerners insisted that seminar attendees should have a proper lunch break: the Russian experts said no, if you let them go to the canteen you will never get them back. They will go back to their desks in the Ministry for the rest of the day. While we would have given participants the benefit of the doubt, and felt in some way that our credentials as training providers were at stake, we reached a compromise position, and refreshments were brought into the room. But all the participants took the cue and disappeared for a more substantial meal. Given the dire warnings from our Russian colleagues, and what we knew about morale, we chose to view the return of more than half of them as a measure of success. After all, we were just starting our work on the project and needed to maintain our confidence. Nevertheless, a struggle was engaged. From now on, there would be an uneasy truce between us as to

which 'side', Russian or Western, had the most consistently reliable perspectives on what was happening and how we should respond. The tensions inherent in the relationship are hinted at in this comment from a report:

In some respects it was unfortunate that Dr. Z was not available for the second round of seminars, but on the other hand it afforded the British consultants greater flexibility and freedom in the delivery.

The following extract refers obliquely to a serious crisis which threatened the continued integrity of the team:

[T]he project co-ordinators..., did everything they could to make our visits and work as successful and problem-free as possible. They obviously went to enormous efforts in the overall organisation of the programmes. In the last analysis, however, they are working for their bosses in the beneficiary organisations, and they may experience some particular challenges in their dual role. Specifically, if consultants are not able to be in contact with project management during working hours, and co-ordinators are acting as intermediaries, it is essential that they pass messages about our work on to the team leader first, and not to their superior.

Blurring of the boundaries between roles, and fuzzy lines of accountability and reporting, characteristic of the Russian organisation, can prove a challenge to a Westerner, however experienced and culturally sensitive he or she may think themselves to be, when work pressure and isolation raise anxieties and insecurities. However, little of this experience is communicated, and the pressure to maintain a neutral managerialist or professional tone leads to a rational/emotional splitting (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994), in which the emotional element is depressed or cauterised. As this happens, language also tends to become more vague and generalised, as evidenced by this report extract, written after field visits in one region:

We are not at all optimistic about the possibility of reforming the Children's Houses and orphanages and we believe that the current emphasis on developing community support services is the right approach. We recognised that social care systems in Sweden and the UK have found it difficult to change the pattern of work of their large residential units.

In contrast, the same impressions were relayed to colleagues in the following terms:

We were deeply disturbed by our experience....[T]he level of emotional and psychological distress was marked. We saw children who were in tears, others showing clear signs of deep depression and a general state of emotional blankness in many of the children.....This behaviour was either ignored by the senior staff or explained away..

Later, the notes allude to the distress felt by workers who were had to send children from broken families to orphanages:

If families had not improved after six months then the child could stay for a further term. If the home was still unsuitable the child might have to go to the Children's House but we were told 'our job is to do everything we can to stop children going to the Children's House because it is not a family.

These extracts relate to the phenomenon of institutionalisation in staff, although only the second communicates the attendant despair, embarrassment, and denial. While justifiably avoiding any connotations of blame or judgement (note the implied message "we have the same problems as you"), the tendency to split off the emotional experience from what is communicated in formal documents

may lead to habits of vague expression which, as well as avoiding emotion, also avoid commitment to specific forms of action. Here is an example from the project Inception Report:

Much of the care provision currently available in Russia is based on institutional care....an expensive method of social protection [that] can often not target and assist the most vulnerable. We are recommending a shift towards a more community based care system and one where people are treated as individuals with individual needs.

A comment from the Ministry in Moscow complained that the project's Inception Report was superficial - "reflected too little of the policy conversations in Moscow and did not describe in sufficient detail what the remedies for change might be". The Ministry and other Russian bodies might reasonably expect that the consultants would spend time together working on their report and discussing their recommendations at some length. They might be surprised to learn that this would be rather unlikely, half a day being allowed from the consultancy budget for producing the report, and no budget to support consultant meetings outside Russia. The individual would be unlikely to frame firm recommendations to the Ministry under such circumstances, preferring to play safe with appeals to general principles and 'artfully vague language'. One of the Western consultants expressed his frustration thus; "There was a lot of unsureness. Nothing is structured well.....We are running the same way as the Russians, having ideas but without content, or context." Frustration was channelled into arguments over project administration, falling short of modelling ideal management for our Russian colleagues. In turn, these conflicts generated a good deal of heartache and anxiety, as we continued to cling to the process consultancy ideal (Schein, 1988) in the belief that one of the most powerful sources of transfer of meaning (Jankowicz, 1994) is through *how* you communicate what you know through how you behave. In spite of negative feelings about shortcomings on the project side, we did not refrain from criticising our Russian partners for their perceived vagueness. Of proposals for local initiatives:

The majority of the targets identified in the documents fall short of being SMART, in that they fail to meet one or more of the criteria. It was general for targets to be presented without any quantitative indicators, which may give rise to unreasonable expectations with corresponding pressures on staff. The size of staffing establishment for the projects is not made clear, so it is not possible to judge whether the targets are realistic or not.

### **Patterns of leadership**

Extract from report:

This project has demonstrated that there are leaders in the regions of exceptional vision and leadership ability. Senior managers in the social sphere are nevertheless currently working under extreme pressure, exacerbated by rising expectations on the one hand and diminishing resources on the other. Tacis and the Ministry are recommended to investigate the specific management and professional development needs of these managers and leaders, and separate their needs from those of the junior and middle management level.

Russian local administration managers have to be strong leaders, behaviourally, intellectually, and by disposition. In the social sphere they face immense resource difficulties in the face of rising demands, and depend heavily on personal power bases to maintain a level of service. In structural terms, it can be argued that their position has changed little since Soviet days. In particular, hierarchy, and consequently notions of accountability and team management, reveal fundamental differences in approach. Currently, a key difference is that Russian managers, unlike their British counterparts (Hearn *et.al.*, 1992) are unlikely to have been social workers themselves. Differences between Western and Soviet conceptions of hierarchy are illuminated by the metaphor of the matrioshka, the traditional set of Russian nesting dolls in which each doll snugly holds another smaller one, down to the very tiniest (Lawrence and Vlachoutsicos 1992; Vlachoutsicos and Lawrence 1990,). This metaphor, as well as being culturally very neat, carries some explanatory power in demonstrating how

the Soviet system of task units, discrete working bands or brigades headed by team leaders, differed from the commonly accepted Western model of hierarchy. In the Western model, a manager at one level in a hierarchy is responsible to the manager above, and responsible for the activities, outputs, etc. of the next layer down in the hierarchical chain. Beyond that, further downward responsibilities are delegated to the next level down. In the Soviet system, every manager was responsible for everything in the hierarchy underneath him, and thus had to concern himself with fundamental operational issues when called upon, even the top man. Lawrence and Vlachoutsicos emphasise the punishing long hours worked by the Soviet manager, and the amount of time put in by top managers to walking round the plant, concerning himself with routine operational matters, and discussing them with line workers, which in a Western factory would be left to the foreman or junior managerial level. These findings reinforce to some degree the observations made by Manoukovsky (1993) about prevailing management style as being at once autocratic and open.

In social services we observed a distinct matriarchal variant of this management style. Female service heads were accustomed, not only to being open to personal representations from their staff, with whom they enjoyed fiercely close working relationships; but also to receiving at their headquarters successive queues of the aged, infirm and otherwise distressed with personal pleas for help. Many would travel long distances and sit in the corridor for hours on end. Departments operated rather in the manner of a royal court, each matriarchal leader having an entourage of secretaries, personal assistants, even dressers and cooks. In return for long hours, total commitment and unstinting loyalty, members of the team would be rewarded with the devotion of the leader and an element of reflected glory and influence. These women leaders and their teams operated at a high emotional level; driven by the excitement of innovation and adaptation to the challenges facing them, they were also easily moved to tears and under visible strain at the demands made on them. A strategy for coping was to find solace and strength through bringing religious or spiritualist practices into the workplace. For example one top manager, a woman, has a special room in her suite of offices containing an icon; another, a man, professes himself an 'extra-sens' or clairvoyant/medium and makes no secret of his use of New Age contraptions, as well as the mobile phone, to make his work environment more positive. Such eccentricities would tend to be dismissed in the West: in the Russian context they may provide, in the absence of a coherent ideological framework for the development of society, a much-needed personal defense mechanism against anxiety and despair.

The tendency of Western management discourse to split off emotion from reason (Albrow, 1997) may provide a partial explanation for the shift of emphasis within the project to a more or less restricted focus on social work practice and service delivery, rather than on service management. Participant observation records of seminars for managers in the regions provide supporting evidence of the importance of the emotional dimension at all levels. On one occasion, I was presenting the topic of team management. I was working through an interpreter, which is never ideal, and energy in the room was low. A Russian colleague interrupted and suggested that the concept of team was problematic because there are several Russian words which denote 'team' and the choice of the correct one to communicate *my* meaning was rather crucial. As we opened up the discussion to investigate the semantic possibilities (were we aiming for connotations of a brigade, or a group, or a sports team, for example?) I began to be acutely aware of the complications. By referring to 'team management' was I communicating, through the interpreter, the concept of management *through* a team, *by* a team, or management *of* a team? (For a debate on the particular problems posed by transfer of terminology in the context of management knowledge transfer see, for example, Holden, 1995; Jankowicz, 1994; Gilbert, 1998.) I wanted to be able to clarify the message and eliminate the confusion, but found myself in a dilemma; the deeper we got into the discussion about what do we mean by team, the more I would be exposing the vagueness and non-specificity of our common management terminology in English. It had been a long and very trying day. Time was short and I had not bargained for this linguistic diversion. Eventually my frustration broke through, I had had enough and I wanted to go home. I stopped pretending to be cool, calm and collected, and it was obvious to everyone that my patience was at a limit. Afterwards, I was congratulated. "We didn't know what you were talking about until you got angry. It was just words. Then, suddenly we could see that your idea of

management *meant* something.” The emotional outburst was a key incident in the development of mutual understanding. It was a salutary lesson to me that the breakthrough occurred only when I let my professional persona drop, along with its customary splitting off of negative emotion from reason, and my ‘real’ integrated self showed through.

## Ideological positions

From final report, a description of a conference in one of the pilot regions, addressed by a Deputy Minister who had flown in from Moscow:

Attended by about 250 people, this conference was addressed by Mr Kisilyov, who spoke at length about the problems of reforming the legislative framework of social protection for vulnerable groups in the Russian Federation. He touched on key themes for the audience, including the poor state of current legislation, understanding the social and cultural effects of rapid change, and recognising the pioneer nature of social work in these circumstances.

At this stage, towards the end of the project, the country was reeling from the immediate effects of the currency collapse of August/September 1998. TV news was once again showing empty shop shelves in Moscow, and the prices of food had doubled in two weeks. The future was looking decidedly uncertain and the most innovative and committed social workers and their managers were wondering how they would find the material and personal resources to continue. To be a pioneer in a new profession in such circumstances is a heavy burden, in which a coherent set of shared values may give psychological support. Although we found a high degree of consistency in the value set regarding clients and their needs, we encountered a wide range of ideological positions regarding the position of the state in the ‘welfare mix’, a critical issue for the future development of the profession and the service as a whole.

This range of responses differed on several value dimensions or continua, including:

- A. Idealistic orientation, ranging from Marxist materialist (Soviet pride) to Christian spiritual
- B. Collectivism-Individualism
- C. Socialist - capitalist

giving rise to typical personal positions as follows:

Idealistic orientation:

Soviet pride: “How have we, once the greatest empire in the world, come to this? How can we allow ourselves and our people to be so humiliated?”

Christian spirituality: “It is our duty to do God’s will by helping those who are more unfortunate than we are. We become closer to our true nature by serving the interests of others”.

Relational ethic:

Collectivist: “We are all in this together. The suffering of some is the responsibility of all”.

Individualist: “I am capable of empathising with the suffering of my brother/sister”.

Political orientation:

Socialist/Social democrat: A mixed economy of welfare to protect the weak in a just polity.

Capitalist: Minimal provision to alleviate casualties of inevitable and positive change.

These orientations do not manifest themselves within managers and workers in a neat and tidy dualism. They can and do combine to form complex and sometimes contradictory personal ideologies, and an awareness of the contradictions within them may create personal dissonance and even distress. As well as idealistic and pragmatic approaches to the provision of social services, we

have come across deep cynicism borne of fatigue and bitter experience. In some regions, for example, social workers are not being paid, and managers are only too aware that their services only stagger along because workers come from families with some other source of income, possibly outside the legitimate economy. Elsewhere, social workers are receiving less in salary than some of the pensioners they are there to support. The range of attitudinal sets we encountered, among workers, students and managers, regarding the position of social services is outlined below:

- A. Social service, and the profession of social worker, is a valid and viable outlet for the good citizen who genuinely wants to help people. Not everyone want to be a capitalist, but neither do they want to be on a human scrap heap. We have also seen the conditions our disabled people live under, and have now been able to contrast these with the way disabled people are able to live in the West. We want to help build a new and more just society, even if we don't see it in our lifetime.
- B. In the current situation of socio-economic breakdown, trying to develop a social work system is a neurotic defence mechanism. Managers too are caught up in a pretence that anything meaningful can be done. The role of management is to provide an organisational front to what is essentially a voluntarist activity. There are parallels here to the old Soviet joke "We pretend to work and they pretend to pay us"; you could say "We pretend there is a system and you pretend to manage it".
- C. Social work is a genuine and valid first step in the development of an emancipated civil society. Recognising the major constraints and problems, the role of management is to oversee incremental responses, maintain accountable and professional operations, and make the difficult decisions about the most equitable and effective ways to use pathetically limited resources.
- D. At a collective level it makes sense to have a system of social services, but at an individual level it makes no sense to be a social worker. It would be more rational to encourage the development of the third sector in the form of self-help groups, self-advocacy schemes etc. When the upturn comes these groups will then have the strength and experience to lobby for more resources so that they can manage their own services.
- E. Managers of social services are the mouthpieces for disseminating new approaches to dealing with social problems. They can educate the politicians, and they have to take the lead on the moral and ethical, as well as operational dimensions. They must develop public understanding of social services, and the role of the social worker.
- F. In the current absence of a strong democratic state and mature civil society, social work must remain a marginal activity aimed at providing a palliative for the worst casualties of the transition period. To this extent it is an agent of social control, but very weak, because the state is not strong enough to sustain it. The role of management is to provide minimum funding and control for it to prevent it from collapsing altogether.
- G. No-one would rationally choose to be a social worker in Russia. If the situation improves, serving social workers and students will waste no time in taking up more lucrative and congenial employment. If the situation worsens, social services are too fragile to cope, and the system will collapse.

Managers are presently caught between uncertainty at the ideological/institutional level about the role of the state in the lives of the people, and uncertainty at the operational level about what social work is and what it means in practice.

## Conclusion

Insofar as it is valid to draw conclusions from these reflections, it is reasonable to suggest that an appropriate response for Western 'experts' supporting the development of services is not to peddle the notion of a value-free science or technology of management (misleading), nor to offer a bland homogeneous mishmash of uncontentious 'European' principles of management (superficial), nor to attempt to impose a value set which belongs to a relatively stable social system (culturally and temporally inappropriate); but to concentrate on building professional practice the ground up. In the context of addressing social needs in Russia, the rational/emotional divide characteristic of North-western European approaches to management may be of limited help. As we experienced in the project, attention will tend to drift away from abstract notions of management and organisation and gravitate towards concrete issues of practice at the operational level, and transformational qualities at the leadership level. Values are at the heart of the development of a functioning and sustainable civil society.

There is a need for professionals to be supported to develop their own practice and ethos. Managerialism may have to follow later, and an interim approach is to offer support and mentoring to leaders on an individual basis. Western management concepts delivered through group training programmes are not yet relevant, services not yet being sufficiently developed to require concentration on specific techniques of integration and co-ordination. Meanwhile, recognising the endemic projected anxiety in our own social and helping organisations may mean that we discover that something can be learned from Russian leaders of social services: how to confront and reconcile the split between the rational and the emotional in management.

Furthermore, the psychoanalytic notion of splitting, previously applied to nursing and medicine, may be helpful in illuminating the dynamics of relationships between Western management consultants and their Russian clients. Faced with impossible expectations, people experience deep levels of anxiety at their feared inability to fulfil others' expectations. They split off the unacceptable parts of themselves (the parts that are confused, unworthy, irrational, angry), projecting them onto another group. Splitting may be masked in the neutral tones of reports and documents, but reveals itself in observation and discourse.

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