Existential Values and Insights in Western and Eastern Management: Approaches to Managerial Self-Development

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Abstract

Continual pressure on managers, their efficiency, and the need to search for novel solutions to problems can lead to psychologically demanding situations. In efforts to understand the main obstacles to work and to effectively manage work-related processes, and in the need to achieve personal development, new approaches that are based on existential philosophies emerge. The aim of this article is to highlight the ways in which existential approaches have been used or discussed in management and to show that existential themes and their applications in management can also be found in the Eastern tradition of thought. The paper presents six case vignettes from management practice that use Western and Eastern existential insights and offer recommendations for self-development of managers. The paper concludes that although it is difficult or impossible to create a unified framework of existential philosophy of management because of the diversity of existential approaches and because of the problematic nature of comparing Eastern and Western philosophies, it is possible to work towards gathering applicable insights and values.

Introduction

Existential thoughts are inspiring even beyond the domain of philosophy. The existential themes that are discussed in this paper are not only related to a philosophical movement that we might call existentialism, but more generally to a variety of existential approaches. There are several reasons for this. First, existential themes appear across different western

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philosophies, from motives in the work of Søren Kierkegaard, through phenomenology, to various philosophies of existence. Additionally, the origins of existentially oriented thoughts can be traced to the very beginnings of philosophy. Secondly, the term existentialism has become too broad and problematic so we prefer to talk about different types of existentialism. For this reason, some authors do not want to be associated with existentialism at all. This term grew in popularity during the twentieth century and has since lost its more accurate meaning. Thirdly, within the eastern philosophies that relate to different cultural and historical contexts, we rather talk about the thematic similarities and the fundamental problems that relate to people and their existence.

In this article we use two terms for the practical consequences of these existential themes and motives that are reflected in managerial literature. Within the framework of self-development, we can speak about values or insights that influence managerial self-development and therefore managerial practice. It is necessary to note that these values and insights are interconnected. In common usage within existentially oriented texts, words such as authenticity, awareness, or freedom are labelled as values. It is easier to imagine the practical consequences of these values without deep reflection. The term existential insights that we use throughout this article is employed for situations and matters that require additional comments to envisage their applicability. This can lead either to creating values or to concrete actions. We define existential insights within this article as contributions from various existentially oriented approaches of philosophy that may be applied in management and business. These existential insights are based on themes that are common to various existential approaches and therefore represent a link between these movements. Contributions from these insights relate to the following topics:

1) *The creative process of becoming a manager in a complex and dynamic business environment and permanent changes that affect managerial practices.*
2) *The opportunity for self-development through understanding and reflection of the major work-related obstacles that are directly connected with the identity of a manager and his or her being, such as experiences of uncertainty, anxiety, failure, crisis, possibility of non-existence,* etc.
3) *The fundamental values that can be drawn from existential approaches such as the value of human life, freedom, authenticity, responsibility, and self-realization.*

The relationships between these existential insights and values can be demonstrated in the following example. Some managers are capable of authentic presence. We can say that this is an existential value. These managers are aware of the important context of their work, they are able to reflect on significant facts, and they not are not living in a mechanical mode that prevents any innovative views or problem solving. Other managers, but also those who live authentically, may fall into an inauthenticity, a mechanical way of practice (see the section on Heideggerian Approach to Management). However, when confronted with various experiences, such as uncertainty or anxiety, they are taken out of this state. Here we come to the knowledge that certain experiences and motives influence us, and during self-reflection (or in dialogic learning, see the section on Existential Hermeneutic Phenomenology in Management) this can serve as an existential insight to self-development.

Managerial self-development can be defined as "a process of self-initiated and self-directed development of skills and knowledge to enhance managerial performance" that can be divided into two phases – self-understanding and self-change (Nesbit 2013, 538). While the first phase

is related to understanding the performance gap, the second phase is associated with the ability to make self-directed change. Moreover, as Nesbit (2012, 2013) points out, there are three interrelated skills to managerial self-development process – self-awareness, self-reflection, and self-regulation. As will be argued in this article, development in all these skills can be enhanced by employing existential insights.

Beside linking existential approaches with self-development and practical implications for management, this article aims to explore how existential topics appear in Western and Eastern management approaches and show that there are similarities in the two sets of approaches. Unlike research that seek differences across cultures, this article focuses on similarities. Speaking of existential issues – and the question of what it means to be a manager and be in the process of becoming a manager – we come to the basic characteristics of human life.

The discovery of similarities between Western and Eastern approaches, enabling a better understanding of both perspectives, represents an opportunity to apply existential insights and values internationally. Within the organization, but also in teamwork, a shared mindset is necessary to ensure a common direction towards achieving business goals. Interconnecting Eastern and Western concepts in a framework of existential management is also important when developing this approach as a philosophy of management, as both cultural perspectives can provide mutual enrichment. In a globalized world, it is particularly important to point out that, despite the differences and uniqueness of individual nations, ethnicities, and cultures, there are certain values related to a common humanity that need to be further developed in international dialogue. This should be the ambition of existential management, which represents a promising platform for meeting the challenges of the twenty-first century. This article provides an initial opening for this dialogue and fills the gap in the missing link between Eastern and Western existentially oriented management philosophies. This first step is related to the fact that existential issues are not just a purely Western concept developed in the context of Western continental philosophy.

The comparison of Western and Eastern philosophy, as well as the comparison of different existentially oriented philosophies, involves a number of problems, which are discussed in the first part of the article. The following two sections will describe the existential insights and values that appear in Western and Eastern management. This overview represents the basis for further developing existential management as a perspective on the philosophy of management, which will provide a future framework for both practical and theoretical research. Existential management is currently a relatively fragmented discipline that is being developed in several streams related to works by various scholars. The last part of the article presents six case vignettes from management practice that use Western and Eastern existential insights and offer recommendations for self-development of managers.

Existential Philosophy of Management

Existential management can be characterized as an approach that emphasizes the value of the individual, which provides a framework for examining organizational behaviour and ethical issues, and also helps grasp the meaning of work (see MacMillan et al. 2012). It is also very closely related to how the value of interpersonal relationships is perceived, and the fact that other people are important in the constitution of ourselves (Müller and Jedličková 2020).

MacMillan et al. (2012) in their study showed how existentialism relates to management, however, an overview of the application of these ideas was not provided. The authors conclude

their paper by stating that "it is early days yet and our understanding of existentialism within a work and management context is like all philosophy: it raises more questions than answers, which must continue to be explored" (MacMillan et al. 2012, 39). This article builds on these efforts and addresses the question of the ways in which existential ideas have been applied in management and the benefits they have for managers' self-development.

This section considers two fundamental issues. The first concerns the development of a unified framework of existential management philosophy. As suggested in the introduction, it will be shown that the diversity of existential approaches does not allow for the development of a unified philosophy, however, it will be argued that this is not a barrier to the application of existential ideas. Moreover, within existential self-development, an approach of critical enquiry is important, which must always leave room for questioning previous assumptions and conceptions. The next part of this section considers the problems associated with comparing Western and Eastern traditions of thought.

The Problem of Synthesis and Development of a Unified Existential Philosophy of Management

It seems that the synthesis of diverse existentially oriented approaches and their applications in management is possible not in the sense of creating a single model or framework, but in the sense of bringing together a collection of existential approaches, tools and their applications in practice. As is clear from the very dynamics of the existential approach, which always touches lived practice, the aim is not to create a new unambiguous rule of games.

As Segal and Jankelson (2016) show, the philosophical approach – and the existential approach in particular – is an activity in which we question the rules of the game and arrive at a questioning of them that concerns not only the principles but also the foundations of our own identity and the ways in which we attribute meaning to our world. Different writers, who could be classified as thinkers of existentially oriented approaches, arrive at different concepts, and even if they use similar concepts, their understandings differ. It is worth mentioning that even individual existential insights and values can be understood differently by different authors. The diversity of approaches of existentially oriented authors can be well demonstrated by one of the key ideas of existentialism, which is often considered to be defining.

As MacMillan et al. (2012) mention, "existentialism is based on the premise that 'existence precedes essence' – that people are thrown into the world and simply exist and their essence is created through the lives they choose to live". However, this idea of Sartre (1948), which is related to the outright rejection of human nature, may not be compatible with the concepts of other authors. For Camus (1956), for example, the concept of human nature plays a central role in his political philosophy (Müller 2021).

Although we see that there is absolute disagreement between Sartre and Camus regarding human nature, it will be seen in the following sections that existential ideas are used in management without having to arrive at a thorough synthesis of all approaches. In considering the process of becoming a manager, we can allow for both the assumption that the manager is shaped through the necessary experience of practice and his natural characteristics and determinants concerning humanity.

Differences in understanding across existential approaches also apply to individual concepts. An example is the concept of authenticity. In his analysis of authenticity in existential authors, Golomb (2005, 61) shows that while previous thinkers, such as Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, uncover authenticity in the spirit of pathos, other thinkers, such as Heidegger

or Sartre, approach authenticity through a systematic ontological concept. Authors like Camus return to an earlier, intuitive approach.

All approaches, however different, have something in common. They touch on the human condition, the way humans exist in the world, pointing to the fact that within managerial practice our real being is somehow diminished and reduced. It then depends on the particular situation and the individual in question what existential approach best characterizes his or her existential situation and can be a vehicle for self-reflection and subsequent self-development. In the case vignettes, we will see that while Paul (CS2, CS3) arrives at authentic experience through individual experience of anxiety, finitude and guilt, which corresponds to Heidegger's existential rhetoric, Kim (CS6) seeks to return to authentic work through stepping out of anonymity by joining a community, which is associated with political engagement. Kim's case is more in line with Patočka's approach, which, like Heiddegger's, considers the awareness of one's own finitude as the only way one can be truly authentic, but unlike Heidegger, Patočka does not reserve this authenticity for an isolated existence as it relates to entering *polis*. While the mass of anonymous individuals is a "being-with" for Heidegger's Dasein and is a necessary and constant part of our existence, other people do not determine our essence, they do not determine whether we will be authentic (Jedličková 2020, 47, 56). These examples show that although there are many types of existentialism and the views of the authors often differ, we can find certain contexts of managerial practice where diverse ideas can be applied.

Missing Eastern Existential Motifs and the Problem of Cross-Cultural Comparison

In the context of a comparison of Western and Eastern philosophy, many issues related to the commensurability of these traditions of thought are discussed in the literature, especially issues of methodological, metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical commensurability. Among scholars concerned with the comparison of Eastern and Western approaches, we find both proponents of radical commensurability or incommensurability and authors who favour a sober position that seeks to compromise by pointing out similarities while acknowledging the many problems and challenges of comparison (Vaseková and Müller 2021).

We find many differences in the two traditions of thought (Moor 1951). For example, often commented upon are opposites such as intuition vs. rationality, practicality vs. theoreticality, etc. However, Das (1952, 632), for example, argues that pointing out these differences often stems from the lack of awareness of Eastern philosophy by Western authors, and we can find different concepts in the two traditions. Das concludes that it is not possible to compare the traditions as a whole, but rather to speak of comparing individual movements. Synthesis is not necessary, and even if it were achieved, it would be an entirely new philosophy (Das 1952, 635). Similarly, Wong (2020) points out the existence of even milder views on the possibility of commensurability.

Another argument for incommensurability is based on emphasizing the frequent presence of central terms in a philosophical tradition for which there are no suitable equivalent terms in another tradition. However, as Wong (2020) mentions, a more acceptable strategy than the general acceptance of this argument is to examine incommensurability on a case-by-case basis. Other arguments for the possibility of comparison are based on the idea that the people whose concepts we are trying to interpret live in the same world as we do. Again, however, caution is necessary, as there may be different emphases on similar values held by traditions of thought (Vaseková and Müller 2021), and the Western reading of Eastern traditions is often – if not always – an Orientalist reading (Said 1978). Moreover, Wong (2020) points out that,

especially when an author is a dissenter within his own tradition of thought, he may be driven to find an approach within another tradition that, from his perspective and style of argument, "gets it right".

In our comparison, we acknowledge all of these problems. Our aim is to open up the possibility of exploring existential ideas to Eastern authors and thus to broaden the research agenda of existential philosophy of management with new perspectives. It will be very beneficial for future research if managers and management theorists influenced by the Eastern thought tradition engage in a discussion of existential philosophy of management. However, as complicated as the comparison is, we agree with Fleming's (2003) observation. Fleming (2003, 260–261) points out that this comparison of the differences and similarities between the two traditions helps to recognize what assumptions we use in our thinking without being aware of them. It is thus a kind of meta-philosophy that helps us to reflect critically on our own assumptions and conceptions of philosophy in general. It is the examination of the presuppositions of thought that many existential approaches in management, especially existential hermeneutic phenomenology, are concerned with.

Even in the context of management, we find a number of studies that point to differences in traditions of thought. In addition to the differences in Eastern and Western management and leadership that are frequently described and analysed within managerial and cross-cultural studies, we can also talk about the compatibility of specific concepts, or at least the basic ideas (Lui 1996), and we can see efforts to link these traditions to develop new directions for managerial education (Li-Hua and Lu 2014). Both similarities and differences can provide a basis for the mutual enrichment of both traditions. Western management is currently looking for new approaches that would be beneficial to managers in the context of the numerous challenges of the twenty-first century. It is philosophy that inspires critical discussion with traditional approaches that are not entirely sufficient to meet modern challenges.

As comparative studies have shown, we can recognize the common signs in the thinking of the authors of Eastern philosophies and the existentially oriented Western approaches. Scholars discuss the main connections between these traditions, point out the differences, and make an effort to bridge the gap between these philosophies to find ways of mutual enrichment. As an example, we can associate the analysis of similarities and differences between Buddhism or Zen Buddhism with the work of Kierkegaard (Jacobson 1952; Giles 2008), Heidegger (Umehara 1970; Steffney 1977; von Eckartsbeg and Valle 1981; Storey 2012), Sartre (Medhidhammaporn 1996), Merleau-Ponty (Park and Kopf 2009), Camus (Brown 1995), as well as, for example, the relation of the Eastern approaches and existential psychology (Martz 2002; Aich 2013). Also discussed is the context of Buddhism and phenomenology (Lau 2016), which is important for capturing lived experience. These trends have also influenced new disciplines in the field of first-person neuroscience, such as neurophenomenology (Varela 1996).

Western Existential Insights

Within Western philosophy and Western intellectual circles, the movement known as existentialism has had an influence on the development of existentially oriented ideas. This direction was not a unified philosophy, but as Kaufmann (1975, 11) points out, rather a sign for different levels of defiance against traditional philosophy. Influences from both the philosophy of existence (Kierkegaard, Nietzsche) and the horrific war experiences of the

twentieth century lead to an emphasis on the subjective being of man, and existentially oriented ideas became very popular. Despite the diversity of these approaches, it is possible to see various commonalities in the themes (see Flynn 2006, 8), even in the work by authors who explicitly rejected their inclusion under existentialism, or who presented themselves as critics of this movement (see for example Camus 1979). Some of these common topics that we call existential insights in this article will be discussed in the context of management.

The Existential Manager

Before analysing new approaches that seek to apply existential insights in managerial practice, respectively in the development of managers, it will be useful to mention the article of George Odiorne (1966), who appropriately describes the link between existential insights and management. As Müller (2021) shows, it is Odiorne's article that represents an important outline of the assumptions of existential approaches to management. This text, which can be understood in the context of a critical discussion with logical positivism, its lack of understanding of managerial work, and the manager's position in the world, is still important today as there is a growing interest in alternative approaches capable of returning to a person who cannot be reduced to efficiency indicators. These approaches are then discussed.

Odiorne (1966, 109) begins his thoughts by mentioning the disarray of management theories and their plurality which is associated with failed synthesis efforts. In his approach, he returns to the inexorable complexity of acts and choices that are linked to the manager's situation. It is the situation of an existential manager who is not associated with a lack of empirical data – but rather a situation where there is too much of it. It is ontology, the science of existence, that, according to Odiorne (1966, 110), is the best framework for organizing the data related to the situation of an existential manager. Although this existential approach may not be recognized in managerial practice – it is often subconscious – it represents a philosophy "around which the successful manager organizes his life and work" (Odiorne 1966, 110).

The manager must exist, make decisions, and act when confronted with the uncertainty of the world. Uncertainty is a key and necessary attribute of the world when we are talking about entrepreneurship, as for example Ludwig von Mises (1998) showed in his work. Yet management theory is ill-suited to deal with uncertainty. In this respect, Odiorne draws attention to some situational limits of management theory. The importance of Odiorne's idea, also reflected by Vandyshev (2015) in his description of existential problems related to management, relates to the fact that managerial theories are oriented towards the biggest companies and the principles associated with their success. Odiorne talks about the situation of management in the 60s and points out that nobody considers the smaller firms that are unstable and have a low duration of existence. The managers of these firms are far removed from these theories because the economic world itself is removed from these theoretical approaches. This fact is related to the process of becoming a manager that we later discuss (see existential hermeneutic phenomenology; Segal 2017). In this respect, Odiorne takes Sartre's (1948) condition of man or woman that becomes a key characteristic for his form of existentialism: "The manager first exists, then makes himself" or herself (Odiorne 1966, 111). Moreover, not only managers, but the whole organization is in the process of transformation and its existence leads to its purpose. As Collins and Porras (2011, 106) point out, we can speak about corporate existentialism in relation to the philosophical reasons for a company's being.

In the context of our analysis of the existential insights, Odiorne's existential topics, those that he understands as situational limits to management theory, are important. These existential

motives are related to situationality, luck, struggle and conflict, inescapable guilt, and death. Situationality of the manager refers to when a manager is trapped in an endless cycle from which he or she cannot break free. According to Odiorne (1966, 112), the manager is always in a dynamic case study that is followed by another requiring a new solution. For a detailed analysis of this existential category in the context of a parallel with Camus's metaphor of Sisyphus, see Müller (2021). Moreover, as Müller (2021) shows, the work of Albert Camus is one of the most inspirational sources of existential management, especially now in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, but also generally in the context of analysing the absurd nature of an organization and its consequences (Blomme and Bornebroek-Te Lintelo 2012; Blomme 2014).

The situation of luck is related to the fact that the manager is confronted with the threat that all plans can be thwarted by circumstances that are not in his or her power (Odiorne 1966, 112). It is this situation that reminds us that the uncertainty we face in complex systems, such as in the world economy, is often artificially reduced by reformulating it as a quantifiable risk that we believe can be managed (see Hansson 1999). The third situation concerns struggle and conflict resulting from the impossibility of a complete consensus among people. Human behaviour always involves trying to reach a compromise between competing parties. In this regard, Odiorne (1966, 112) recalls that one of the starting points for economic reasoning is the discrepancy between unlimited demands and scarce resources. In more dramatic words, "the absurd is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world" (Camus 1979, 32). This fact is related to another existential situation which is inescapable guilt. The manager desires success, but failure is part of his Sisyphean journey. This leads to the feeling that it was in the manager's power to do something different (Odiorne 1966, 113). A high level of responsibility is linked to these considerations. The last situation that is not captured in classical management is death. It is the time-span of not only a human life but also the life of a corporation (Odiorne 1966, 113).

The Existential-System Approach to Management

Joe Kelly and Louise Kelly (Kelly and Kelly 1998, x) propose an approach that reflects the managerial needs in the context of dramatic changes and their human consequences. Their approach is based on a combination of scientific studies on organizational behaviour related to systems, structures, and processes with existential and traditional values that have origins in ethics and philosophy. This represents a useful set of beliefs within the organization's efforts to reach its purpose. In our exploration of existential insights, we will focus on those characteristics of approach that touch existential motives.

Existential managers cannot begin their life with an organization without accepting a complexity that cannot be captured by a simple scheme. They are confronted with the constant need to fight the system and find themselves in a permanent crisis (Kelly and Kelly 1998, 18). Moreover, there are other crises to face. These crises relate to the consciousness of finality that will one day come and point at our own mortality. In addition, in the working life of executives there are crises involving identity. Every shift in career is associated with a new beginning, but also with changes – disruptions – that can lead to self-doubt (Kelly and Kelly 1998, 50).

A prerequisite for understanding organizational behaviour is the orientation in personality characteristics within the people of the organization. Kelly and Kelly (199, 42) suggests that the synthesis of systems theory and existentialism represents a very useful approach to personality theory. In describing existential personality, the authors rely on the findings of

existential psychologists Rogers and Maslow. According to these authors, existential man or woman understands himself or herself within the process of becoming a manager – his or her life is a process, rather than the desire to reach the final state. This existential manager makes an effort to understand himself or herself as he or she is "searching for an image of himself [or herself] that is accurate enough to be workable yet acceptable to him [or her], and that will allow him [or her to live his [or her] life with joy and zest" (Kelly and Kelly 1998, 43). An important existential insight on personality can also be recognized in the possibility of encouraging participants in communication processes to raise awareness and authenticity. This type of dialogue is related to "meeting of minds that would lead to a good society where people can find dignity again" (Kelly and Kelly 1998, 38). Dialogue, communication, and relationships are crucial for management practice.

Management is also associated with leadership issues. As Lopez (2014, 109) points out, "separating leadership and management makes the manager a mediocre bureaucrat and the leader an untouchable divine individual". Even leadership can find inspiration in existential approaches. Knowledge related to leadership is gained both from the experience of successful leaders but also from our own experience. The reflection of our own experience is in fact an existential exercise. Kelly and Kelly (1998, 148) describe the three principles of existential leadership. The first principle concerns the fact that existential leaders are seen as charismatic visionaries who consider themselves as the embodiment of the institution that they are part of. Existential leaders can respond to crises from their position and they have a sense of history and of their own fates within the organization. The second principle is that existential leadership does not work with the simplistic picture of reality that tends to be part of traditional management textbook schemes. This approach is linked to a specific lifestyle. It is necessary to face dilemmas such as "quality versus quantity, equality versus individuality, task achievement versus human satisfaction, and ecology versus economy" (Kelly and Kelly 1998, 148). The ability to master a set of conflicting targets requires a specific skill set. In the context of this principle, it may be appropriate to mention the Camusian way of thinking that is in contrast to traditional (Sartrean) existentialism. Camus is looking for a way to live in this conflict – in absurd conditions – without philosophical suicide, a situation where we overcome absurdity by an idealistic construct. Simply put, we will not be tempted to see the world in black and white (Camus 1979). The third principle that Kelly and Kelly (1998, 149) mention lies in the ability of executives to have tolerance for ambiguity. They must also work with team members who have different roles, which is related to the necessity of creating different relationships.

The Heideggerian Approach to Management

Martin Heidegger, a follower of Edmund Husserl, did not consider himself an existentialist, but his philosophy became very influential and undoubtedly influenced later existentially oriented approaches. More importantly, his ideas deal with existential themes as a kind of existential phenomenology. In his work, and also in the approach that we will comment on in the following section, existential insights are mixed with phenomenology and hermeneutics. As is often the case with great thinkers, their work transcends the boundaries of philosophy and become an inspiration for many disciplines. Management is no exception. As Bolle mentions, management today has become a need to formulate a vision of leadership, which raises questions about sense-making, sense-giving related to job satisfaction, and organizational mission. These tendencies lead to new demands on managers who must have important social skills. In the context of these new requirements, philosophy can be considered a way of

"self-management, or of self-regulation, or of self-control as well as self-insight", The philosophy of Martin Heidegger can be significant to training the personal qualities of managers (Bolle 2006, 259).

In his fundamental ontology, Heidegger distinguishes between the Being of entities and entity itself. This ontological difference leads to the question of Being which is related to the questions where entity has priority in this process of asking – in which entities the meaning of Being can be discerned (Heidegger 2001, 26, 32). Our own being is best for this search. In this context Heidegger talks about Dasein – being-there. We are the place of the Being and the task is an analysis of this Dasein – modes of being and situations where this Being is shown. We can approach the Being of Dasein through important states, the existential categories, such as anxiety or Being-towards-death. These thoughts became a very inspirational part of Heidegger's work and have been influential for many disciplines.

The area in which Heidegger's work is discussed most is project management. Van der Hoorn and Whitty (2015, 722) attempt to invoke a discussion that "focused on particular components of Heidegger's work" (for example Cicmil 2006; Sewchurran et al. 2010; Bredillet et al. 2013) to a more comprehensive use of Heidegger's concepts. Therefore, they identify more insights that can be applied in project management, especially in the analysis of a "lived experience". The main project management-related insights are based on the key themes of Heidegger's work, such as modes of being, being-in-the-world, care and temporality, dealing, the they, and inauthenticity, authenticity and fear.

Each of these categories provides a framework for analysing a certain aspect of project work, and for analysing what it means to be a project manager – what is the lived experience of the project manager (see also the following section). Modes of being relates to the analysis of project members in relation to their attitudes, their care towards one another, and the equipment needed in the project. Being-in-the-world is associated with the fact that the manager is involved in project work and in relationships with people and equipment. Awareness of this fact and its analysis helps to reveal phenomena related to project management and to the process of becoming a manager. Care and temporality relate to the being of Dasein – we must care about our Being, we are not only found in time and space, but we must care about something, project and manage something. This is realised in time; in the past (also characterised as being thrown into conditions), in anticipation of the future (projecting towards possibilities), and in the present. The notion of temporality is important for awareness of the project within its time structure that is defined by a start and an end, which can influence the presence of people involved in the project. Dealing is associated with the embodiment of the project members' being in action rather than cognition. This dealing and coping through action reveals the meaning of the project and it is significant, especially because it goes beyond a set of rules, procedures, and definitions of a standard project framework. In addition, some standards and rules, although very important in certain situations, can be very restrictive and hinder innovation. In Heidegger's view it can be described as *the they* that require limiting conformism. Falling into conformism and everyday routines leads to inauthentic behaviour. We solve situations and problems in a mechanical way, without interest, we do not see new, original possibilities. In this respect, the experience of anxiety related to the possibility of non-existence or failure of the project is important to return to an authentic being in the present (Van der Hoorn and Whitty 2015, 723–729).

Existential Hermeneutic Phenomenology in Management

Qualitative research on managerial experience continues to increasingly gain the attention of scholars and represents an important platform to formulate and develop existential management (see MacMillan 2009). As was mentioned in the previous section, the Heideggerian approach represents an inspiring framework for analysing lived experience. Heidegger's work is followed by other approaches that find inspiration in phenomenologically oriented psychology. One of these qualitative analyses of managerial lived experience is the approach known as existential hermeneutic phenomenology (Rolfe et al. 2016), which is methodologically anchored in an interpretative phenomenological analysis (Smith et al. 2009). This approach to managerial experience has two aspects. On the one hand, it provides qualitative data for understanding managerial practices and important moments, especially the so-called existential disruptions, but it is also a method that can help managers with self-development through dialogic learning.

In the context of existential motives, existential disruptions are an important topic. Rolfe et al. (2016, 48) define existential disruptions as conditions "in which a practitioner's habits or conventional ways of doing things are threatened and can no longer be taken for granted". Within the framework of existential hermeneutic phenomenology, these existential disruptions emerge in a cycle that can be divided into categories derived from Heidegger's wok. This cycle starts with being in convection. This situation is related to inauthenticity that means we are doing the average, everyday work. This state can be shaken by existential disruptions. These situations may be related to the experiences such as situations where old methods of work are no longer applicable, or the first feelings of failure emerge. This state is related to existential anxiety or a lack of meaning or purpose of the work. Assumptions arise that question what it means to be a manager. The following phase is an articulation of the disruption. The main problems are described, and threats are named. This leads to liberation through transformation, as the situation is described. This reformulation is very important for the "deconstruction of uncertainty". In this context, existential disruptions may be seen in a positive light, because new opportunities emerge during the reformulation (Rolfe et al. 2016, 2017). In managerial practice, it is important to understand that disruption is not failure, but rather a typical condition in managerial work. As we pointed out, managerial practice is related to the continual necessity to solve new problems that require original solutions; they are new case studies. All these topics are mentioned in interviews with managers, and thanks to this reflective practice, they are able to describe the current situation. This is the first step for learning and self-development. This dialogic learning in the context of management is also supported by other authors (Cunliffe 2002; Corlett 2012).

An important aspect of existential hermeneutic phenomenology is redescription. Rolfe (2016) uses Rorty's (1989) ironic approach to language in this regard, showing that every organization is a language game in which conventions about right and wrong and about the ordinary activities of everyday practice are formed and agreed upon. However, these given meanings are disrupted and the process of redescription is related to the ability to perceive the disruption of meaning as an opportunity.

Existential hermeneutic phenomenology is an inspiration for other authors. For example, Müller and Jedličková (2020) propose extending the framework of existential hermeneutic phenomenology by other existentially oriented approaches that more closely reflect interpersonal interactions. The work by Fink and Patočka is particularly important in this respect. According to Fink (1965), man or woman is not existence, but co-existence, a relationship. Recognizing this fact, Heidegger's existential categories take on a new dimension. Dasein

cannot be only existence but it must be understood as co-existence because we relate to the world through others. This co-existence is multidimensional and relates to several areas of life such as work, struggle, love, play, and death, "people exist with, alongside, or opposing each other" (Fink 1965, 3).

Moreover, Fink, aside from the notion of interdependence of relationships, points to the fact that the human existence is not an indeterminate subject, but human is always one of male or female, and this has been ignored in previous phenomenological analyses (Fink 1965, 3). In the extended framework of existential hermeneutic phenomenology, the analysis of managerial experience is based on the division of managerial experience into three life stages – movements of existence – which is described by Patočka (1998). While the first movement relates to an initial acceptance by others in society, especially in family, the later movements are more interesting for its application in management. The second movement – the movement of defence – relates both struggle and reproduction in our lives with work, but this movement is also characterised by mediocrity, anonymity, and being in social roles without reaching a full-scale existence. Most important is the third movement of truth that tries to give an overall completion and meaning to the previous two movements, and man or woman relates not only to things in the world but to the world itself. While Patočka's movements represent an overall framework, Fink's categories are a tool for analysing the interpersonal relations that are crucial when experiencing existential disruptions (Müller and Jedličková 2020). As recent studies show, communication and interpersonal relations are still considered more important in managerial practice (see Burke and Barron 2014; Zulch 2014; Muszyńska 2017), and qualitative approaches may represent an important source of information.

The Eastern Existential Insights

In our analysis of existential insight relevant to management, we will focus on the approaches of Eastern philosophy that seem to be closest to existentially oriented Western philosophies. These are mainly Zen Buddhism and important streams that influenced its formation, such as Taoism. According to Watts (2000, xvii), when Buddhism came to China, it was in the context of Taoist philosophy that the main issues were discussed, moreover some authors point to considerable similarities between Taoism and Zen (Grigg 1999). It is the Zen approach, along with the Taoist sages Lao Tzi and Zhuangzi, that are analysed in the context of existential psychology (Yang 2017). We will focus on several existential motives that are discussed in the context of management for their practical applicability and will indicate the existential connection with the approaches described in the previous section.

Uncertainty, Anxiety, and Change

Other existential motives that we find in Eastern management are uncertainty, anxiety, and constant change. Although it is clear that these phenomena have negative consequences for managerial practice, it is possible to point out their positive sides. However, it must be emphasized that this does not mean betting everything on uncertainty and resigning to management methods.

Richard Pascale (1978), in an article based on an extensive comparison of American and Japanese companies, points to several important insights related to successful managers and he places these insights into the context of Zen philosophy. The situation in American and

Japanese companies was similar and Pascale listed only two major differences, but the important finding is that successful managers – regardless of nationality – share common characteristics related to communication processes, and it is the Zen approach that provides a convenient framework for expressing these characteristics. Here we will point out the existential dimensions of these Zen compatible recommendations for managers. This existential character of Eastern thoughts is not usually explicitly stressed within Eastern philosophies. However, we will point out this relation.

Generally, the Buddhist approach to the world is associated with the idea that everything, whether physical or mental, tangible or intangible, cannot exist without changes (Chang 2002, 233). The Zen approach to life is characterized by working with ambiguity and uncertainty as something that can have a positive character. In this context, the Japanese use the difficult-to-translate term – *ma*, which refers to the unknown about themselves (Pascale 1978). In this context, Poropat and Kellett (2006), in their analysis of similarities between TQM and Zen Buddhism, mention that although TQM talks about the concept of variation, for Zen Buddhism this is a typical transience. Poropat and Kellett recall a quotation from the Buddhist mystic Kenko, who stated that "the most precious thing in life is its uncertainty" (cited in Heine 1991, 402). Here we find a connection with the existential dimension of uncertainty. As concluded by Poropat and Kellett (2006), both variation and transience represent important insights for managerial work – belief in the unpredictability of existence and respect for this fact. As Heine (2018, 195) shows, when analysing the rhetoric of uncertainty in Zen texts, uncertainty, in the context of the efforts to understand Zen texts related to life's journey to achieve self-realisation, can be described in three levels. The first level is associated with negative aspects of uncertainty that relate to feelings of doubt and disturbance connected with unchallenged assumptions. However, "feelings of instability and unsettledness persist but are productive in pointing beyond ordinary barriers to the possibility of attaining transcendence" (Heine 2018, 160). The second level is based on positive aspects that relate to experiences after awaking (satori) and is associated with uncertainty in relation to training and leading a group of followers. The third level relates to hermeneutic reflexivity – it is our uncertainty that comes from the complexity of Zen texts (Heine 2018, 160).

The zen notion of uncertainty may be useful in managerial practice. Pascale (1978) points out that we can distinguish between situations where clarity and ambiguity are more appropriate frameworks for reasoning and decision-making. While the clarity framework refers to situations where we have data to work with to simplify the decision-making problem, and therefore the anxiety that arises from uncertainty, the second framework concerns qualitatively different situations. These are complex tasks, such as merging departments, that trigger emotional reactions in everyone involved. The uncertainty framework may therefore provide "the interim step of deciding how to proceed" rather than a first-instance decision (Pascale 1978). Working with uncertainty is the art of how to proceed in complex situations without making a final decision and gives time to gather other important data and information necessary to successfully resolve the situation. As Pascal notes, this work on uncertainty also affects communication, especially the communication of change. In some situations, it is better to report the change only when it becomes a reality through the successive changes that have occurred during the conscious treatment of uncertainty. This approach does not mean resigning to management methods. However, even current research in the field of cognitive science shows that in uncertain environments, more information and computation is not always better, and the "less-can-be-more" approach may be more appropriate (Gigerenzer and Sturm 2012, 243).

Philosophical approaches can be seen as "practice for gaining perspective in the face of existential change and uncertainty" (Segal 2014, viii). This is the acknowledgment that these conditions such as ambiguity, uncertainty, and imperfection – conditions that we may call "existential" (see Pascale and Athos 1981, 139–140), leads to a conscious awareness of the true characteristics of the world – its constant variability. As Pascale (1978) shows, this approach teaches us to "accept the inevitability of obstacles" and "as Tao suggests, acceptance does not convey fatalistic resignation". Conditions such as ambiguity, uncertainty, and imperfection are in the Zen perspective "immutable feet of life, what philosophers in the West have called 'existential givens'" (Pascale and Athos 1981, 140). We can say "yes" and "no" together and find an intermediate way (Camus 1979), "there will always be reasons for anxiety," and "it is important to proceed with the mind, which neither grasps nor rejects" as the teachings of Dogen Zenji indicates (Roshi and Appels 2014, 42).

Moreover, as the above mentioned schematic breakdown of uncertainty in the literary analysis of Zen texts suggests, we can experience the uncertainty that is expressed through the motives of Zen malady – which, according to Heine (2018, 152–153), is "comparable to Kierkegaard's 'sickness unto death' as the cause of anxiety and dread" – consider a disruption necessary for opening up new possibilities. Low and Purser (2012, 351) show, that these Zen insights can be applied in management, that "Zen koan practice can train managers to perceive and reframe dilemmas as creative and dialogic encounters, rather than as stress inducing zero-sum conflicts", moreover "Zen practice offers a unique opportunity for training the mind to tolerate the ambiguities, tensions and contradictions embedded in organizational dilemmas, especially in situations characterized by uncertainty and change".

This understanding of Zen practice reminds us of the approach of existential hermeneutic phenomenology (Rolfe et al. 2016, 2017). Existential hermeneutic phenomenology – as a way of capturing lived experience and as a method of dialogic learning – meets Zen which can be characterized as "a method of rediscovering experience of being" (Watts 2000, ix). Zen leads to experiencing life as it is in the present moment through transformations of consciousness and awakening form the thoughts that affect us. Moreover, Zen cannot be considered in a classical educational way. The wisdom of Zen is transmitted through contemplation and meditation, or the dialogical process of interaction between teacher (Zen master) and student (Watts 2000, ix–x).

Identity, Co-existence, and Interdependence

Other existential considerations relate to identity. In Japanese society, man or woman is not a separate "identity" and the world cannot be divided into separate categories such as "friends, relatives, subordinates", but it is more appropriate to describe reality as "concentric rings of relationships, from the intimate (at the innermost) to the peripheral" (Pascale and Athos 1981, 190). The centre of the ring is the place for the person and a few intimate others and is in contrast to many Western perspectives. Japanese society realizes that our identity is shaped and derived from people who are closest to us – it "is a partial merging of identities" (Pascale and Athos 1981, 190). This view of interpersonal relationships and their significance in relation to the world is reminiscent of the existential idea of phenomenologist Eugen Fink (1965, 3) concerning the co-existence that we discussed above. We cannot break free from these relationships and they affect who we are. Pascale (1978) notes that the Eastern perspective draws attention to the fact that "the real organization you are working for is an organization called yourself" and that "the problems and challenges of the organization that you are

working for 'out there' and the one 'in here' are not separate things." To express the interconnection of individual people in an organization, as well as the fact that people themselves are an organization and that all these links affect our identity more existentially, we can say together with Segal (2014, 96) that "when our organizational practices are disrupted or disturbed, we are also disrupted or disturbed".

Based on the fact that we are a co-existence and that relationships are important for our identity, a significant thought emerges within Eastern philosophies. It is the idea of interdependence. In Buddhist teachings there is no individual or organization that is independent of other organizations or other individuals (van den Muyzenberg 2014). Processes and relations in our modern specialized world support this interdependent, inter-connected, and inter-contained characteristic. As Weerasinghe et al. (2015) point out, the Buddhist holistic view is important for strategic management and environmental scanning, and every modern organization must make an effort to explore the entire space of knowledge in the whole environment. Linear relationships with the environment are not sufficient. In this holistic concept, the organization is a "living creature" and a "sense making organism" because it consists of employees. The creative and innovative character of the organization depends on creativity and innovative ways of thinking by individuals in this organization (Weerasinghe et al. 2015). As we have seen, in the existential-phenomenological perspective we relate to the world through people, therefore people are important in this interdependent character of organizations. Even in Western perspectives there are approaches that consider organizations and enterprises as a living biological organism (Zeleny 2005). The idea of interdependence, and permanent changes that relate to the importance of environmental scanning and risk analysis (Chang 2002), will be crucial in the environmental challenges that organizations and humankind face. In this context, from Heidegger's (1977) perspective of ontological difference, we have to see an organization's processes not only in an instrumental way, that deals with technology and transforms inputs to outputs, but we have to take into account the ontological perspective that helps us to understand that technology, and that these processes have an impact on us. Recently there has been a very visible impact through climate change that represents a significant challenge for not only business-related activities. In a similar way, Eastern wisdom points to this mutual interdependence, and to the fact that people "choose between alternatives that will depend on and have effect on themselves and on others" (van den Muyzenberg 2014, 743).

Struggle, Cyclicity, and Flow to Success in the Middle Way

In an analysis of Eastern tradition and managerial culture, Pascale (1978) discovers another important distinguishing point in the approach of Japanese and American companies. However, this eastern concept is, in our opinion, compatible with the existential approach to management. The western background of the leader is associated with the image of "strength, firmness, determination, and clarity of vision", they are individuals that are "capable of decisive action in the face of adversity". In the Western tradition, these decision makers are thought to be aware of the various facts and options and select the best of them. Japanese tradition has no term for decision making that is consistent with this Western concept. The Eastern concept can work better with the facts outlined above – with "ambivalence experienced when our mastery of situations is imperfect" (Pascale 1978). While Western managers tend to believe that they "decide", for the Eastern concept the word "choose" is more suitable in the context of difficult trade-offs. Eastern management is based on the fact that one simply

has to choose continuously, which refers to the feeling of incompleteness. There are no definitive solutions to problems. Instead, an "individual accommodation to a continually unfolding set of events" is needed (Pascale 1978). In this context, Pascale (1978) reminds us of the Chinese adage that describes the whole situation – "Success is going straight – around the circle". The strength of the leader in the Eastern context is not based on a blind pursuit to keep everything under control, but on the ability to let things flow. Pascale explains this approach with the example of a coral reef that does not face the sea, the wind, the typhoons by building artificial walls around it, nor attempting to stand above the sea level, but still it survives. Here again we come to the existentially understood cyclical concept of managerial work as a constantly new case study that requires original solutions (Odiorne 1966) and resembles the Sisyphean struggle that, as we pointed out, does not necessarily mean suffering (Camus 1979; Segal 2014; Müller 2021).

Buddhism highly appreciates an approach to fact-finding based on the awareness of the importance of moderation. As (Xuecheng 2018, xix) shows, the middle way "is a characteristic description of dependent co-arising and an emptiness of self-nature" that is based on the fact that from the Buddhist perspective that all things lack an intrinsic nature – "they are all combinations of interdependent conditions". These existential motifs represent another large area of East and West comparative phenomenology (see Laycock 2001). Buddhists view the nature of the world through the so-called eight negations, which show that individual phenomena are "neither existent nor extinct, neither permanent nor annihilated, neither identical nor differentiated, and neither coming nor going", as Xeucheng (Xuecheng 2018, xix) reminds us of Nagarjuna's words. Buddhist principles lead to the realization that the middle way transcends duality and reaches harmony. In this respect, it is also important to be in the present moment without attachment because attachment may lead to suffering in the cases when things that are on the pedestal or our interests disappear (Vu and Gill 2019). The concept of the middle way is inspiring in several respects. In management, the middle way concept may be important regarding leadership skills. A leader-follower relationship that is based on the middle way is advantageous in terms of both parties being aware of the extent of their attachment. This conscious approach makes it possible to avoid various potential causes for suffering (Vu and Gill 2019). In the field of economics and sustainable development, emphasis is placed on the middle way in the context of consumption (Daniels 2007) and middle-way economics is discussed in the context of well-being (Brahmagunabhorn 2016).

The concept of the middle way can also be considered very important in terms of Western existential ideas as it draws attention to the modesty in creating the future and its goals. This middle way was pointed out by Camus (1979), who argues that existentialists refuse to live in the middle of opposite positions to try to create an unjustified meaning that ultimately can lead to extreme positions that overlook the value of human life. These ideas, as well as in Buddhist principles, have an ethical dimension.

Case Vignettes from the Application of the Discussed Approaches and Insights in Managerial Self-Development

In this section, we provide several case vignettes that use existential approaches and existential insights to interpret managerial practice. Most of the case vignettes are based on qualitative research on managerial practice rooted in a combination of existential hermeneutic phenomenology and interpretive phenomenological analysis (for a detailed description of the research

method see Müller and Jedličková 2020, Jedličková et al. 2021). This section presents sub-themes characterizing the various existential insights presented in the previous sections and suggests tips for self-development. For further information on each case vignettes, see Müller et al. (2021a, 2021b), Cserge et al. (2020), Kročil et al. (2021).

CV1: The Existential Manager – Situationality

Situation: Hewlett Packard is often discussed in the context of existential ideas, which is closely related to the visionary approach of the founders, aiming at fulfilling the organization's higher purpose and ensuring a dignified co-existence of employees (Collins and Porras 2011). However, the existential situation of HP's CEOs is also an important aspect.

Existential lessons: The existential manager is confronted with situationality, finding themselves in conditions that are associated with a challenging situation that manifests itself as a disruption of business processes, a sense of failure or crisis. Pressure is then placed on the manager to repeatedly come up with original solutions to these situations (Odiorne 1966). However, situational originality can also be associated with taking up a managerial position. As Burgelman et al. (2017) show, none of HP's CEOs started with a clean slate, but took on unresolved strategic leadership challenges that created a constraining context for their own strategic actions. The starting point for securing the company's future was its transformation. This situation is a major existential challenge, as Apotheker mentions: "How do you transform a large, publicly traded company? The answer is probably with only the greatest of difficulties. You probably need an existential crisis with only weeks to go before you run out of oxygen in order to be able to do that (Burgelman et al. 2017, 281)."

Recommendations for self-development: A significant moment for self-development is the realization of the importance of understanding situationality for strategic leadership. Over-coming the dependence on situationality presupposes an understanding of the past that has shaped these conditions. As Burgelman et al. (2017, 338) add, this is a very challenging task as "CEO's are naturally inclined to look forward and probably developed their careers in corporate settings, especially so in high-technology industries, that dogmatically assert the irrelevance of the past". This looking back to the past will be significant in case vignette 3.

CV2: Existential-System Approach – Existential Leadership

Situation: Lucy is the owner and manager of a social enterprise specialising in lavender cultivation and lavender products. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the business faced widespread problems threatening all corporate objectives. The vulnerability of social enter-prises is much greater than that of regular enterprises, as they employ people who are disadvantaged in the labour market, especially those with physical or mental disabilities. Crisis communication with these people requires completely different strategies. Vulnerable people need job security, a regular regime and very sensitive and intensive guidance. Lucy, in her own words, knows exactly how to run a business, win contracts, lead staff – she has a system. But the situation has changed dramatically – Lucy has no choice but to rely on her existential leadership.

Existential lessons: Lucy intuitively follows the principles of an existential leader. Social entrepreneurship means finding oneself in a conflict between social and economic goals, constantly having to balance the two, and facing a difficult dilemma with no calculable solution. The social entrepreneur is an existential leader with a high capacity to tolerate

ambiguity. She occupies a number of roles between which she must navigate gracefully. In this difficult task, she uses an awareness of the history and meaning of the enterprise that represents value to society. Lucy's case is exceptional in that she is also explicitly aware of the role of existential philosophy. In describing the experience of her managerial practice during the pandemic, she mentions the work of the existential phenomenologist Hogenová, a disciple of Patočka. Through the crisis, Lucy comes to a self-awareness that would otherwise be impossible. She, in the context of Hogenová's work (Hogenová and Slaninka, 2019), draws attention to the fact that, despite the tragic and sad moments in life, we need to find out what is most important to us, and that through the ontological distress that we face in the act of courage, we come to meet ourselves (Kročil et al. 2021).

Recommendations for self-development: Lucy used the crisis as a space to pause for self-reflection, which was not possible when working within a traditional system – the set rules of the game. She was thus able to reflect on her identity as a leader and the values of the business. This important self-reflection was able to give her the strength to continue in the business and further develop relationships with people, which led to finding a sponsor to help bridge the most difficult period. It was in the ontological distress she was experiencing that she discovered her own intrinsic value as an authentic leader.

Existential approaches to leadership also draw attention to the importance of asking questions (Hanaway 2019). The insights and values mentioned in the previous sections can serve as guiding topics for self-questioning and developing awareness of the formation of the existential self. Another possibility is to establish cooperation with experts in the field of existential coaching (see for example *Existential Perspectives on Coaching* edited by van Duerzen and Hanaway 2012).

CV3: Struggle, Cyclicity, and Flow to Success in the Middle Way

Situation: Paul has worked as a manager of a number of business projects and now owns and runs his own business. In his management practice he has faced a constant cycle of success and failure. This failure was often preceded by very intense work, when Paul would get into a stereotype of performing tasks – he was in a conventional mode of being. Through self-development activities and an interest in philosophy and spirituality, he has developed a capacity for self-reflection (Cserge et al. 2020).

Existential Lessons: While experiencing a profound crisis – which in retrospect he sees as the most significant moment in shaping his career – he came to the self-reflection that the cause of his failure was the application of learned patterns of behaviour acquired in his family. His motto was: hard work leads to success – success is material wealth. In this respect he wanted to match his successful father. When he realized this fact, he attempted a dramatic change in his behaviour and began to despise the material world. He went from one extreme to the other and became uncritically interested in everything of a spiritual nature. However, he soon realised that this approach was not sustainable and, as he says, it was a matter of finding a balance and a middle way.

Recommendations for self-development: At present Paul is trying to realize "whether he is not in the same circle again", as he calls the situation when he falls into inauthentic experience. This is primarily a situation where he is putting extreme effort into an activity – where he is trying to achieve success "by hard power". For Paul, this excessive effort has always been associated with disruption in interpersonal relationships, and therefore a loss of social support, which has had a negative impact on his self-perception. Currently, he is trying to take a middle way, to be aware of context and his identity.

CV4: Heideggerian Approach and Existential Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Situation: As Paul himself states, to arrive at self-development is not to read a book or an article. The self-knowledge and self-development he achieved was a combination of lived experience and reflection on that experience, which is what philosophical wisdom helped him to do: "I've read it a thousand times, but this was awareness, and that's relatively different, but because I've read it a thousand times, the idea was there somewhere, and the awareness could come." (Cserge et al. 2020).

Existential Lessons: Paul's awareness is related to the awareness of finitude as the possibility of non-being. Paul discovered his temporality – being-to-death. During a difficult period at work, Paul was playing a sport in which he was injured and had to undergo surgery. He approached his rehabilitation much like he approached management and business – hard work will bring success. However, the drastic method of exercise and rehabilitation only made matters worse. In this confrontation with health problems that reminded him of physicality and finitude, Paul realized that the assumptions he had made may not be justified. He began to question the assumptions. He was also confronted with death in a shamanic ritual he participated in. This sense of anxiety about possible death, as well as the guilt stemming from the realization of responsibility for himself, led to Paul's authentic experience of his being and identity (Müller et al. 2021a, 2021b).

Recommendations for self-development: Paul is trying to work with the awareness of his temporality and use it to fulfil his potential. Realizing the finiteness of human existence is also used in existential psychotherapy. Clients who are able to work with the awareness of finiteness gain new energy in life and are able to make life changes (Yalom, 1980, 2008). Paul also practices yoga, which helps him to increase self-awareness. As Kumar (2013, 132) shows, the approaches of yoga that are used in psychotherapeutic practice have much in common with Western humanistic-existential approaches that have their roots in existential philosophy. The development of common characteristics in Eastern and Western perspectives, such as the importance of present time, integration of personality, self-awareness, and an emotionally saturated atmosphere led to the formation of yogic-humanistic-existential psychotherapy.

Lea (2009) points out that the Iyengar yoga techniques enable a focus on the self to be developed, and its practice represents the sources for creating ways of knowing, experiencing, and forming the self. Nevertheless, constant struggle and work are needed to maintain the gained self-mastery. As Yoga is a personal practice it is a highly accessible way of self-development, even if it is not an easy one without instant results. Adhia et al. (2010) have shown that the Yoga Way of Life has a positive impact on both the well-being of managers and the performance of an organization.

CV5: Uncertainty, Anxiety, and Change

Situation: Alex worked as a manager in a very competitive corporate environment where individual managers came with their own ambitions that could not be easily fulfilled. During her managerial experience she encountered crises, not only her own but also those of other colleagues. The uncertainty of the environment, the frustration of unfulfilled ideals and the anxiety associated with this led to feelings of burnout. She now uses her wealth of experience as a trainer and coach. In her journey of self-development, she has focused on Eastern philosophies, especially their existential dimension (Müller et al. 2021b).

Existential Lessons: As Hempel (2002) shows in his comparative analysis of Heidegger and Zen Buddhism, we often judge ourselves by our surroundings and the world, according to criteria acquired by our upbringing and the context in which we find ourselves, without challenging these criteria. This results in us being shaken when reality unfolds differently than we expected. Zen exposes these structures of thought, the dependence on schemas. The study of self leads to detachment from one's own ego and to the recognition of an intimate relationship with all things and one's own nature that was previously unjustifiably excluded from the world (Vaseková and Müller 2021). In the context of her interest in yoga, meditation, spirituality, and her practice as a coach, Alex too is aware of the deep problem of corporations:

> Managers overestimate their importance and do everything they can to be important – that's ego in modern terms. They want to please others and they want recognition. They work, they work, they work, and it doesn't matter how, in what capacity, they want to show themselves in a good light in front of anybody, it doesn't matter, and they want to get that kind of award: you're good. And so, they work. And sometimes the award comes, but most of the time it doesn't. Or not the kind they want. And then that's where the disappointment comes from, the frustration. (Interview with Alex, see Müller et al. 2021b)

Recommendations for self-development: Through five years of deep self-development and existential hermeneutic inquiry, Alex has learned to experience the present moment. Embracing uncertainty and challenging experienced assumptions was a prerequisite. She emerged from "playing games" that were destructive in nature. Alex practices meditation regularly.

CV6: Identity, Co-existence, and Interdependence

Situation: Kim is a property manager in Hong Kong. One of the major crises she has faced relates to her inability to comment on political events in Hong Kong, particularly the anti-government protests. In the workplace, she is expected to be politically neutral. Nor can she protest in her spare time in facilities – shopping malls and other buildings – that are under company management. Moreover, the work is very stereotypical. For these reasons, she is reduced to a mere role within the job. She does not feel like a manager, and the work pressure to be politically neutral also undermines her identity as a Hong Kong citizen (Müller 2020; Müller et al. 2021b).

Existential Lessons: Kim's work identity was based on her relationships with other colleagues at work. But they suppressed her natural determination to fight for political rights in Hong Kong. Kim experienced existential disruption and looked for a new job during this period. She did not want to accept the meaning given by society but wanted to step out of her work role and, as Patočka (1999) shows, to shake up the given meaning, to take risks through undergoing non-anonymous contact with other people and to arrive at an authentic movement of existence through political engagement. Even this step towards a return to an authentic conception of work and life is in some way linked to the awareness of finitude. In the context of Kim's story, we can point in particular to her commentary on the fate of Hong Kong dissidents. Another crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, was necessary for the discovery of her managerial identity. Kim was given the opportunity to feel truly like a manager (Müller 2020). The societal crisis allowed her to bring staff and management together to pursue a common goal – protecting public health. The relationship to self and to the world could be shaped

through co-existence with other people. In addition, Kim gained greater responsibility. However, in the context of this change, she realized that her previous work was not as fulfilling, and she could not express the fullness of her being within the work. She quit her job at the company and moved to the Netherlands.

Recommendations for self-development: If the manager is reduced to his role within the work and his identity is suppressed, this can result in a personal crisis. People shape the context through which we relate to ourselves. It is necessary to perceive how the shared mindset of society affects personal development, job performance and quality of life. In some cases, the organisation may not be compatible with the manager's value system and the employment may need to be terminated.

Conclusion

This article builds on earlier theoretical efforts to capture the intersections between existentially oriented philosophies and management and presents approaches that use existential insights and values in management practice. Moreover, this article proposed a complement to the existential philosophy of management based on the Eastern perspective. Although previous studies have provided various comparisons of Eastern and Western approaches, the definition of common existential motives and their applications in management has not yet been made. Existential management has so far been an exclusively Western discipline based on some of the representatives of continental philosophy. Despite the many problems of comparative philosophy that have been mentioned, an initial effort has been made to develop an existential philosophy of management as a cross-cultural research program. The focus on these similarities will allow the formation of a common existential mindset within international organizations and teams. Existential management can be understood as a shared platform to form dialogue for a common existential humanity aimed at developing managerial skills.

In the introductory part we mentioned three important skills for self-development – awareness, self-reflection, and self-regulation. We have shown in many places in this article that existential knowledge is directly related to self-awareness. For example, the relationship of the authentic experience of presence that is associated with a greater awareness of particular facts. From the managerial point of view, the existential emphasis on interpersonal communication and relationships is very important. This self-awareness is also related to the notion of temporality. Time scheduling is crucial for management and a good definition of a time structure is necessary because it influences the presence of people involved in the activities of an organization. The approaches inspired by existential motives also emphasize an awareness of the actual conditions of the world that are connected to complexity, uncertainty, and dynamic changes. Self-reflection is an important part of existentially inspired approaches, as well as the Eastern approaches where existential motives are also visible. Managers think about feedback that is provided by a complex world. These managers are continually confronted with new critical moments and reflect on their abilities to face them. Existential insights teach that the experience of crisis, uncertainty, and anxiety do not mean an absolute failure in their skills. This self-understanding and characterising the performance gap – clarifying obstacles to deal with real conditions of the world – make managers stronger and inspire them to think in new ways that are not limited by any old patterns of thinking. This permanent learning process leads to self-regulation – changing the ways we work in order to achieve the goals of the organization despite the challenging conditions. However, it is

necessary to note that applying the existential insights of Western and Eastern philosophy cannot simply be based on a study of these observations, which, moreover, cannot be easily recorded in management manuals, but it requires a long-term and systematic self-development – seeking access to the world and training the person to deal with uncertainty, avoiding extremes, managing tensions and stress, or developing wisdom through dialogue. Specific existential lessons and opportunities for self-development were presented in six case vignettes that showed how key existential insights and values can be used in practice. We believe that these examples will be inspiring for the further development of existential philosophy of management.

Declarations

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