

Joanna Kłodkowska, PhD dissertation: *Radzenie sobie ze zmianami w organizacjach (na przykładzie pracowników OHP) (Coping with changes in organisations: The case study of the Voluntary Labour Corps workers)*, Faculty of Education, University of Lower Silesia, Wrocław, 14 June 2012

On 14 June 2012, a public defence of Joanna Kłodkowska's the Ph.D. dissertation titled *Coping with Changes in Organisations: The Case Study of the Voluntary Labour Corps Workers* took place at The Faculty of Education of the University of Lower Silesia. The dissertation was written under the supervision of Professor Bożena Wojtasik and reviewed by Professor Agnieszka Stopińska-Pajak (University of Silesia, Katowice) and Professor Józef Kargul (University of Lower Silesia, Wrocław).

Joanna Kłodkowska graduated in education from the Faculty of Historical and Pedagogical Sciences of the University of Wrocław. Since 2002, she has worked at the Department of Social Pedagogy and Counselling of the University of Lower Silesia. From the very start of her academic career, she has been interested in social changes related to education and counselling, which as if naturally led to her Ph.D. project. In her dissertation she sought to identify, understand and describe the ways of coping with changes within their organisation displayed by the workers of a vocational counselling institution called the Voluntary Labour Corps (VLC).

To present and analyse the collected material, Joanna Kłodkowska relied on an ethnographic approach and drew on Erving Goffman's theatrical metaphor. In a highly consistent and creative way, she identified and labelled the ways of coping with organisational changes, peculiar drama of those changes and the specificity of the studied institution as a 'stage' for its employees, whom she termed "organisational workers."

The Voluntary Labour Corps was established in Poland in the 1960s to support the development of national economy and provide young people with basic vocational education. The organisation has managed to survive the political and economic transformations of the 1990s and still functions with its mission statement expressed in the motto of "Nurture – Education – Work." The VLC tries to help

the youths at risk social exclusion through creating conditions that enable them to complete education and get vocational training. Despite the socio-economic transformations and new objectives set for the VLC by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy in the 2000s, the organisation is still stigmatised as a remnant of the previous system, installed to implement the communist ideology and provide cheap labour force necessary to build the socialist state.

As the VLC, an exceptional institution on the Polish counselling scene, keeps transforming and searching for its new place in the contemporary world of labour and vocational counselling, it was a perfect candidate for research on intraorganisational changes. This, combined with the selected research framework and the timing of research (which coincided with the dismissal of an old and the appointment of a new VLC commander), enabled the author to observe how the VLC workers experienced the changes within their organisation and how they coped with them. The results of the investigation were described in the six chapters of the dissertation.

Chapters one and two discuss the theoretical underpinnings of the research project, i.e. the theory of Social Becoming by Piotr Sztompka and the theory of Conservation of Resources by Steven S. Hobfoll, and outline the historical, political and educational context of the VLC as a point of reference for understanding its activities between 1958 and 1989.

Chapter three presents the methodology of the study based on the qualitative paradigm and largely relying on the ethnographic method. Chapters four, five and six report the research results, depict the identified phenomena and processes and try to label them adequately. They describe changes observed within the VLC (e.g., the alteration of its status, organisational culture, and the ways in which it functions locally) and characterise and interpret the social events which may have contributed to the decisions made by the VLC workers in order to cope with the changes at their workplace. The metaphor of theatre is used to feature the social events experienced by the workers. The dissertation sketches the “line of social life of a change-affected institution,” which illustrates its dynamics in the real world.

Based on her research results, Joanna Kłodkowska defines coping with intraorganisational changes. In her view, it is “organisation members’ (e.g. workers’) search for the ways of overcoming insecurity resulting from the loss of their sense of continuity, stability and security. Such coping strategies are a construct developed in the process of becoming a personalised community and engaging in the common social-historical praxis, which proves the community’s potential for self-transformation and capacity for developing some remedial measures.”

The author details nine ways of dealing with changes within an organisation: dramatic co-operation, assigning a role of bureaucratic hero, protective practices, avoidance of embarrassment, saving the organisation’s face through the social construction of group emotions, camouflaging undesirable elements of a “spectacle,” highlighting its desirable elements, rewarding members of the workers’ community and dramatic disciplining. According to the author the ways of coping with

organisational changes listed above are, so to say, “social adhesive” serving to consolidate a group of workers who experience changes in their organisation and try to adapt to their new situation.

The dissertation produced by Joanna Kłodkowska was highly evaluated by the reviewers. They not only noticed its novel approach in finding interesting research fields (a transforming organisation and its workers’ ways of coping with the changes at their workplace) but also commended the author’s creative and methodologically unconventional research and analysis of its findings. Taking into account all the merits of the Joanna Kodkowska’s dissertation the Board of the Faculty of Education of the University of Lower Silesia decided to award it. The Board members also recommended it for publication.

Joanna Minta

(Translated from Polish by Wojciech Gromski)