Albert Camus and Management: Opening the Discussion on the Contributions of his Work

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Abstract

This article responds to a call from *Philosophy of Management* (Vandekerckhove 2020) to open a discussion on the contribution of Albert Camus's work to management. The aim of this article is to argue that Camus's sense of cyclicity related to the recurrence of crises is particularly important for existential management. This idea is embodied primarily by Camus's famous retelling of the myth of Sisyphus, which is not only a provocative metaphor of his thoughts, as discussed by many authors, but is also an inspiring expression of the idea of revolt, which is further developed in Camus's later work. The article focuses on recent updates to Camus's Sisyphean revolt in existentially oriented approaches to management. These are mainly the concepts of the existential manager, an analysis of managerial lived experience within existential hermeneutic phenomenology, and the perspective of an absurd organization. Camus's motif of cyclicity represents a stimulating framework for analysing lived managerial experience, which is characterized by alternating phases of success and failure. The article also draws attention to other important motives in Camus's work, such as avoiding extremes and idealistic constructs, and expressing the value of human life as a basis for ethical behaviour. All the mentioned motives are closely related to the concept of revolt. This article also provides several explanatory comments on the editorial, which help to take a closer look at Camus's style of thinking and avoid possible misinterpretations. In this respect, the distinction between Camus's approach and forms of existentialism is particularly important.

Keywords Absurd · Camus Albert · COVID-19 · Crisis · Existential management · Revolt

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Introduction

Albert Camus is a renowned author, mainly due to his literary success. Less well known, however, is his philosophical thinking, which at first glance seems easy to understand, yet may lead to misinterpretations, especially since it can be easily confused with other types of existentialism (Müller 2020a). Not only did Albert Camus reject the designation existentialist (which is not particularly remarkable as this designation has been rejected by many philosophers and writers), but he was even an explicit critic of existentialism, as evidenced in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. His work therefore remains existential in the motives and themes that he develops, but not in the core of ideas that conflict with Sartre's (1948) best-known form of existentialism.

Another problem is that readings of Camus's work are typically incomplete. To understand the depth of thought, it is not enough to read only one of his two main philosophical essays. To understand the meaning of the absurd it is necessary to read *The Rebel*, and to understand the starting points of *The Rebel* it is necessary to know *The Myth of Sisyphus*. In this respect, for example, the well-known biologist Richard Dawkins (2012), who comments on *The Myth of Sisyphus*, makes mistakes, not only by looking at the metaphor of Sisyphus as a guide for life (for which he criticizes Camus), but also by offering his own kind of revolt without mentioning that Camus himself devoted his work to the revolt (Müller 2018). While reading these two essays can point to the overall breadth of Camus's ideas and to the method of his reasoning, other texts point to the interconnectedness of the two concepts.

In the first part of this article, this philosophical context will be elaborated on. It is necessary to understand Camus's specific way of thinking, and this will tell us how Camus's ideas can be applied in management. The next part focuses on concepts from existential management that refer to Camus's work, especially the concepts of the existential manager (Odiorne 1966), the perspective of the absurd organization (Blomme 2014), and existential hermeneutic phenomenology in management (Rolfe et al. 2016, 2017; Müller and Jedličková 2020, Cserge et al. 2020, Müller 2019, 2020b). By existential management we mean an approach to management that realizes that the manager is essentially an existential manager (Odiorne 1966) and that every managerial crisis is associated with an existential crisis, at least in the sense that it affects interpersonal relationships that are constitutive for every human being. Existential management uses individual motives, values, and insights that stem from existentially oriented philosophies. As MacMillan et al. (2012, 27) show, the existential approach makes it possible to emphasize the value of both the individual and the existential self as they form in the workplace. It also provides a framework for examining organizational behaviour and ethics as part of philosophy, and also helps us understand the meaning of work through its procedural nature.

In the existential approaches to management, the metaphor of Sisyphus and his destiny to constantly undergo victory and failure will be especially important. In the next part, how Camus's ideas relate to management research is discussed, and research questions for qualitative research on managerial lived experience are proposed. This discussion covers three parts. The first part covers the motive of absurdity and constantly recurring crises, as mentioned above. The second part covers how to avoid creating idealistic constructs and – using terminology by Pascale (1978) – the position of the middle way. The third part covers business ethics, where the primary quantifier is the value of human life.

Philosophical Background and Interpretative Notes

To see the specifics of Camus's thinking, it is necessary to realize that the term existentialism is rather useful as a literary term, as it points to the fact that different authors deal with similar topics. Unfortunately, the concept of existentialism became so popular outside professional circles that it lost its significance (Novozámská 1998). We nowadays discuss the different *types* of existentialism. Strictly speaking, Camus's work, especially *The Myth of Sisyphus*, is a critique of existential philosophies. Camus (1979) showed that existential approaches seek to offer a solution to the absurd by glorifying that what crushes them. Ultimately, this may mean they endorse a particular idealistic construct. Camus's approach is characterized by the important realization that blindly fulfilling any ideal diminishes the value of individual human life (Camus 1991a, 170). Existential approaches, as Camus says, commit philosophical suicide (1979, 32). Camus's goal is to preserve all members of the equation – the world, humanity, and the absurd.

The absurd can be understood as the contradiction between our desires and the unreasonable silence of the world. What does this silence mean in the context of today? We demand from the world clear order, structure, and hierarchy, because only through those are we able to effectively coordinate human activity. These are the requirements that we put into plans through which we want to shape the future and change the world. It is management that represents the mastery of these activities, it is a scientific representation of our desires in organizational practice. But management, as a purposeful coordination of organizational behaviour, is confronted with the real nature of the world, which is far from the meanings we attach to it. The current situation associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, which, in addition to exacerbating the current problems of the globalized world, is severely disrupting the order that is essential for human activity. It is at this time that the absurdities that management must face is portrayed more clearly and many times more dramatically than at any time in the period since the world wars. The existential perspective in management takes on at least the same topicality in the context of the events of 2020 as it did in the post-war period when existential concepts were developed. In Camus's words – the world is silent – it admits tragedies that were hardly imaginable for us. As Camus shows, this absurd does not exist in the world or beyond, but it stems from ourselves – from our frustration at the failure to manage and coordinate processes in the world. This absurdity is not only born in medical management, which faces huge challenges related to capacity at hospital facilities or logistics for vaccination operations, but also in other fields where activities are significantly disrupted.

Obviously, the most dramatic experience associated with the absurd is death – we do not have to do anything and yet we die. The absurd is not an abstract principle, but it is based on empirical experience. The absurd is the first evidently unquestionable certainty. According to Camus, there is no destiny that cannot be overcome by scorn, but a better and more coherent way of life is revolt (Camus 1979, 107, 53; 1991a). This rebellion “is born of the spectacle of irrationality, confronted with an unjust and incomprehensible condition” and “its blind impulse is to demand order in the midst of chaos, and unity in the very heart of the ephemeral” (Camus 1991a, 10). We can say that the manager is the hero in revolt. It should be noted, however, that this revolt is not a revolution that defends the abstract ideal. This revolt has its limits. Camus (1991a, 284) shows that “rebellion is in no way the demand for total freedom” and in addition it “attacks the unlimited power that authorizes a superior to violate the forbidden frontier”.

The planned removal of the absurd has negative consequences. It is necessary to preserve it to some extent and to reject physical and philosophical suicide. In the context of concerns

about idealistic constructions leading to totalitarianisms of various kinds that promise to remove the absurd, Camus admits that life is better without any absolute meaning. Camus's statement that life without meaning is better lived is, of course, debatable. Some authors, such as the existential psychotherapist Irvin Yalom (1980, 428), concluded that Camus himself had unjustifiably arrived at his own personal meaning in life. Camus's statement makes more sense at the level of liberation. Camus (1979) is convinced that if people imagine the meaning of life and begin to submit to the demands of this goal, those people will become slaves to their own freedom (Müller 2018).

While interpretations such as Yalom's suggest that Camus is shifting from the absurd to other values, some interpret this point to a deeper connection between early work associated with the absurd and later work associated with the revolt. Foley (2008), for example, draws attention to the coherence between the concepts of absurd and revolt. As Müller (2020a) shows, the connection between the two phases of Camus's work is based on Camus's sense of human nature, which is one of Camus's assumptions that is fundamentally at odds with Sartre's (1948) existentialism. Sartre was convinced that there is no human nature, that a person first exists then creates their own essence. Sartre (1988, 257) was aware of this connection and so considered Camus's work to be politically inapplicable, because human nature is opposed to the proletariat. Camus, on the other hand, sought to defend a form of human solidarity that is not based on class but on human nature, or at least on the human condition (Foley 2008).

What is human nature according to Camus? The absurd, as a feeling, empirical experience born in the midst of perceiving an individual's desires and in the reality of the world, and revolt, as an attitude, which is not a revolution fighting for something permanent and absolute, are two components of human nature (Müller 2020a). We have to say "yes" and "no" to the absurd, and human nature shows the appropriate degree, because people have something in common that unites them when needed (Camus 1949, 1954), so that they can fight violence and oppression. The denial of human nature, the assumption of its unlimited formability, the construction of absolute goals in the future, leads the way to totalitarianism (Camus 1991a).

In this context, it is possible to offer a different point of view than Vandekerckhove's (2020, 131) claim that "for Camus, absurdity can be overcome by a "leap of faith", the choice not to hold on to rational expectations of the world, but instead openly accept the irrationality of our choices". Unlike existentialists who overcome the absurd by a "leap of faith", the absurd remains especially important to Camus. Yet Camus (1979, 24) does not believe in reason, and accordingly believes that the absurd admits irrationally. Although it might seem, as Camus admits, that in the context of the absurd the consequences of all actions are equal, there is a value that is worthy to preserve through revolt. It is life – the value that becomes the core of ethics, although it may not be logically deducible. It is the revolt leading to solidarity and rejecting violence that becomes central to Camus's further work. Especially in *The Rebel* and in *The Plague*, human choices are not entirely irrational – no action can be inferred from absurdity without prejudice to human judgment. In *Caligula* Camus (2008) shows that it cannot be said that all actions are equal, as this is in contrast to human opposition to cruelty, which it is based on the belief that there are acts that are more noble than others. Even in this early work we find an act of revolt. As Foley (2008) mentions, the fight against the absurd is not just about scorn but is directly linked to a revolt that has a political and social content. In this context, which in some sense a way shows the self-realization of humanity, we can agree with Yalom (1980, 428) by stating that Camus arrives at a certain meaning of life. Not an absolute one but the earthly meaning, which is constantly shaken by the reality of the world.

Life with the absurd and the act of rebellion represent a constant struggle (see Thody 1959, 26) – it could be said to be Sisyphean. Equally, the fates of people are linked to this struggle, whether it is the doctors fighting the bacillus plague, such as Dr. Rieux (Camus 1991b), or doctors fighting the coronavirus, or managers who face obstacles and crises within their organizations. In the following sections it will be shown that in these ideas, which relate to absurd conditions, the value of human life, solidarity, and the fight against absolute utopias can be applied to management and it will be described how different existential approaches in management reflect them.

Existential Management and Camus's Sisyphean Revolt

Humanistic approaches were developed in management in the 1960s. They defined themselves against the positivist picture of reality that persisted in the theory of management at the time. Philosophy, as well as its existentially oriented philosophical streams, led to the realization that employees, including managers, cannot be reduced to only their job roles, but must be treated as complete human beings. An example of an existential approach to management during this period is an article by George S. Odiome, “The Management Theory Jungle and the Existential Manager” published in the *Academy of Management Journal* in 1966. The clear influence of existentially oriented philosophy on management is clear in this text. Odiome's article will serve as an introduction to further interpretation, as it points out that we can define existential management as an area of management philosophy that applies existential knowledge to the theory of management.

Odiome (1966, 109) was convinced that the managerial theories of his time did not lead to unification that would be tangible and applicable in practice. On the contrary, these managerial theories were drowned in chaos. The manager in this situation is an existential manager who does not suffer from a lack of empirical data in this environment, but is forced to face a situation where there is too much data available. The manager is confronted with the inevitable complexity of choices and actions. At this point, it is worth noting that the current situation with the onset of globalization and the development of information technology is even more dramatic than it was in the 1960s, and both provide a framework for Odiome's reflections. The science of existence, as Odiome says, is an ontology that provides the basis for organizing data related to the situation in which existential managers find themselves. This existential approach is often not recognized in practice, as it becomes unconscious. It could be said that this is a philosophy “around which a successful manager organizes his life and work” (Odiome 1966, 110). Odiome further defines the basic limits of managerial approaches and these limits relate to existential motives. The basic existential motives to which these limits of theory relate are situationality, happiness, struggle and conflict, the inevitability of guilt and death. For an existentially inspired approach to management, the manager's analysis in the context of existential motives becomes apparent. Existentials are also evident in the Heideggerian approach to management (Bolle 2006, Segal 2010, Van de Hoorn and Whitty 2015), which works with the existentialism of Martin Heidegger (2001), especially that developed in *Being and Time*. The approach of existential hermeneutic phenomenology (Müller and Jedličková, 2020) also works with existential categories, which develops the Heideggerian concept (Rolfe et al. 2016, 2017) by the philosophy of Fink (1965, 1969) and Patočka (1966, 1998). Fink, like Odiome, defines the basic categories, such as work, love, struggle, play, and death, which are all coexistences – areas in which people, through interaction with other people, relate to the

world. Therefore, this approach develops the original existential concepts that do not emphasize interpersonal interactions and relationships. What unites individual existential approaches is the oft-mentioned motive of cyclicity – the constant repetition of critical situations – that very often refers to Camus’s work, especially Camus’s retelling of the myth of Sisyphus.

Sisyphian Situationality of the Existential Manager

Odiorne comes closest to Camus’s thinking when describing the first limit of managerial approaches – situationality. Situationality – finding oneself in a situation – refers to the fact that a manager is trapped in an endless cycle of alternating situations from which he cannot free himself. Odiorne (1966, 112) says that the manager always finds himself in increasing numbers of dynamic case studies that require new solutions. According to Odiorne, the existential manager is constantly forced to accept a difficult fate that consists of the need to pursue success, but then is followed by failure after failure. Although the manager wants to be successful at all times, the place at the top is just an illusion.

Another connection between the existential motives that Odiorne mentions and the work of Albert Camus can be seen in the case of struggle and conflict. People have different needs and preferences. It follows that their needs are different from those of other people, and it is therefore impossible to reach a full consensus. Human behaviour must always involve some attempt to reach a compromise between competing parties. In this context, Odiorne (1966, 112) mentions that the starting point for economics is the discrepancy between scarce resources and unlimited demands. At this point, it is interesting to note that the basic economic starting point is, in essence, very similar to the basic idea of Camus’s reasoning, which concerns the absurd – an unquestionable certainty. This absurd is based on the confrontation between human desires and needs and the unreasonable silence of the world (Camus 1979, 32). In this way, we can find this absurdity on an economic level, in the event of not achieving the set goals, despite the fact that we can make the greatest effort. In a more dramatic way, we can talk about the very existence of an organization that can disappear at any time. Odiorne (1966, 110–111) points out that smaller organizations in particular have a shorter lifespan, noting that contemporary management theories do not pay enough attention to this.

Although Odiorne’s approach has parallels with Camus’s thinking, in one way he remains more faithful to Sartre-type existentialism, which is incompatible with Camus’s position. As we pointed out in the previous section, Camus recognizes human nature, and human rights play an important role in his thinking. However, Odiorne (1966, 111) follows Sartre and claims that “the manager first exists, then makes himself”. This statement refers to Sartre’s idea that a person first exists then creates their own essence, which Camus disagrees with. However, in the context of management, this statement is more appropriate. The person taking on the role of a manager is a manager by nature of this role, but in fact, he or she only becomes a manager through lived experience. We are talking about the process of becoming a manager (see for example Segal 2017). Even so, the denial of human nature – basic assumptions – can lead to the false assumption that a person is absolutely malleable, and everyone can project their life towards managerial success. Questioning human nature is always dangerous in the context of Camus’s thinking, because in extreme forms it can lead to the degradation of human life in the name of a constructed ideal.

Lived Experience of Managers and Existential Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Segal (2014, 44) mentions the recurring existential crisis of managers and refers directly to Camus's Sisyphus. Segal's interpretation more faithfully follows Camus's idea that Sisyphus' struggle with the boulder takes on certain positive dimensions (Camus 1995, 166). This aspect of Camus's work is very often discussed. Many authors criticize Camus for a positive conclusion, where he says that it is possible to imagine that Sisyphus is happy (Müller 2018). As we have already stated, this idea is incomprehensible, for example, for Dawkins (2012), who, in Camus's conception of Sisyphus Criticism, is a bad guide to life, because he believes that it is necessary to revolt against fate. However, these critics forget the fact that Sisyphus' starting position is not a position of choice – Sisyphus cannot decide otherwise because the conditions do not allow it. His revolt lies in the very activity – rolling a boulder.

As Müller (2018) shows, suitable parallels for the depiction of a happy Sisyphus is Shukhov, the main character from Solzhenitsyn's (2005) short story *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, who is a convict in the gulag. After a day full of carelessness, cruel toil, and pain, he manages to survive and gets extra food and so Shukhov says: "A day without a dark cloud. Almost a happy day." This is exactly the same Sisyphus who revolts for the preservation of life (the most important value of Camus), although he knows that people like him do not let go of the gulag.

Segal (2014) understands Camus's Sisyphean metaphor very well in the context of management. Segal interprets the Sisyphus myth in such a way that, thanks to repeated efforts, Sisyphus – the manager – becomes stronger, meaning that he becomes more flexible – he is able to reconsider previous ways of performing individual activities. Segal recalls that it is essential for management to accept changes that disrupt previous methods of work, and so adapting to the dynamic nature of capitalism. Accepting this change becomes part of self-understanding. Segal, like Camus, shows that this Sisyphean situation is not only absurdly hopeless, but is associated with a certain type of rebellion against conditions. It is in this rebellion that it is possible to see an element of happiness. As Carroll (2007, 64) mentions, "the 'nothing' he accomplishes each time he pushes his rock up to the very top of the hill is in fact the 'something' of art," and "perhaps even the 'something' of a politics of revolt".

However, through the revolt, which has a collective form, Camus transmits the Sisyphean motif to the level of the whole of society. In this respect, as already indicated, Camus's Dr. Rieux from *The Plague* can serve as an example. The level of interpersonal relationships is pointed out by research in the field of lived managerial experience (Müller and Jedličková 2020, Cserge et al. 2020), which shows that managers experiencing constantly new critical moments – new crises or case studies, as Odiome says – are always part of interpersonal relationships. It is the shocks in these relationships – the problems of coexistence and at the same time stagnation in an inauthentic way of life – that are the common causes of crises. Research shows that the manager, like Sisyphus, is constantly forced to deal with alternating phases of success and crisis. Those managers who have a sense of revolt, yet at the same time realize that the crisis – absurd – is part of life and has its positive aspects, are successful and can persevere in a managerial position. It is therefore possible to imagine a happy manager.

Absurd Organization

Blomme (2014, 162) notes that Camus's way of thinking may be useful for recognizing what it is like to be a person in an organization. It is Blomme who rightly notes the important

relationship between the two philosophical essays by Camus: In *The Myth of Sisyphus* he explores the human condition within organizations; in *The Rebel* he proclaims an answer to the question of how one can fulfil the moral duty to defend the human condition and dignity of others. This idea is well described by Foley (2008, 4), who states that “according to Camus, if the absurd is not to degenerate into moral nihilism it must rehabilitate itself in the light of revolt, and that if revolt is not to deteriorate into a regime of tyranny and oppression, it must remain conscious of its origins in the absurd premise”. According to Camus, existential philosophies lead to philosophical suicide (Camus 1979, 32). Camus believes that all existential philosophies suggest an escape from absurd, and “through an odd reasoning, starting out from the absurd over the ruins of reason, in a closed universe limited to the human, they deify what crushes them and find reason to hope in what impoverishes them” (Camus 1979, 35). In Camus’s later work, we see that this unfounded thought process, based on the deification of the abstract ideal, leads to dangerous consequences at the political level.

Blomme shows the connection between a non-existent being – living in everyday life and falling into social roles, as Heidegger describes it – and the alienation that Camus mentions. As Blomme claims (2014, 171), “we could describe the process of alienation as psychological suicide in answer to the absurdity of the organization”. Blomme defines the absurd organization as a place where people struggle with their dignity and the conditions in which they find themselves, clashing with the futility of their actions. Routine is often necessary to perform tasks, but organizations are not designed to give a deeper meaning. At this point, there is existential anxiety and alienation. This alienation can be characterized as a consequence of the routine of an absurd organization that fails to fulfil its mission. Bolomme sees it as a defence mechanism related to a surrender to the routine. Current research shows that under the pressure of demanding tasks and due to the disruption of interpersonal relationships (for example a mismatch between top management and middle management, owners and management, and colleagues), managers are separated from the experienced meaningfulness of work (Müller et al. 2021) and “in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger” (Camus 1979, 13). In the context of the events of 2020, the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and the growing trend of the home office, when interpersonal relationships are disrupted more than ever seen in previous decades, we can assume that these ideas are becoming more and more relevant.

Recognizing the absurd organization and significance of Camus’s ideas, Blomme leads to three important pieces of advice. The first recommendation concerns the development of the ability to perceive existential anxiety. Blomme notices these very important facts:

Integral to Camus’s philosophy is the idea that we are obligated to recognize that these existential fears occur in an absurd organization, but also that they are the conditions for learning, feeling, expressing emotions, imagining – in short, for taking hold of our human dignity and exploring it. (Blomme 2014, 172)

This observation is very important for research working with the lived experience of managers.

The second piece of advice, according to Blomme, is the emphasis on creativity. However, creative activities should not lead primarily to the service of an absurd organization, as this organization has no deeper meaning. The emphasis should therefore be on the creative process, not on the abstract goal. In this regard, according to Blomme, we should “see ourselves as Sisyphus in an absurd organization and find meaning in rolling the stone uphill” (Blomme 2014, 172).

The third recommendation concerns Camus's revolt. In the context of Camus's thinking, Blomme draws attention to the issue of rebellion. He argues that as we gain more power through psychological violence, our existential anxiety grows, but this leads us to fear that we will lose that power. Blomme describes the solution in the form of a revolt as follows:

Rebellion in an absurd organization is not rebellion against the existing powers, but a denial of the meaning of these powers. We need to say no to the absurd organization. On the other hand, we need to say yes to solidarity, which lies in co-creating meaning in collective action. A person cannot become more human in an absurd organization by being creative on his own; he must also urge others to rediscover their human dignity. (Blomme 2014, 172)

In the context of Camus's thinking, one could argue against revolution in the way that revolution always leads to something that seeks radical change in the name of truth. If the revolution is led to eliminate the absurd – we come to the point where we deny the logic of Camus's reasoning. To live means to let the absurd live. It is an acceptance of the absurd without resignation.

Directions for Further Research in Existential Management Inspired by Camus

In the context of the approaches to existential management mentioned above, we can identify several areas for research that could be inspired by the ideas of Albert Camus. These research activities can build on these existential and phenomenological philosophies that are employed in management. At the end of each section, several questions will be proposed for qualitative research on managerial experience.

Sense of Absurdity and Perpetual Crisis

As we have shown in the previous section, the motives of recurring crises and the fate of Sisyphus are frequent topics in existentially oriented management. At this point, we comment on the current COVID-19 crisis, which is a prime example of a serious crisis that repeats throughout human history, although we may not have had personal experience with it. Just as Camus's hero, Dr. Rieux, knew that the plague was returning, so we must admit that similar crises will recur. We will also outline several questions that arise from the motive of the crisis and cyclicity.

A parallel between Camus's novel *The Plague* can be found in the descriptions of the Italian physician Dr. Daniele Macchini:

And there are no more surgeons, urologists, orthopedists, we are only doctors who suddenly become part of a single team to face this tsunami that has overwhelmed us. Cases are multiplying, they arrive at a rate of 15–20 admissions per day all for the same reason (Macchini 2020).

The staff are exhausted. I saw new levels of tiredness on faces despite the already exhausting workloads they had. I saw the solidarity among all of us, who never failed to go to our internist colleagues to ask, "what can I do for you now?" (Macchini 2020).

We find similar passages in Camus's novel *The Plague*, in the descriptions of Rieux's lived experience:

It was by such lapses that Rieux could gauge his exhaustion. His sensibility was getting out of hand. Kept under all the time, it had grown hard and brittle and seemed to snap completely now and then, leaving him the prey of his emotions. No resource was left him but to tighten the stranglehold on his feelings and harden his heart protectively. For he knew this was the only way of carrying on. In any case, he had few illusions left, and fatigue was robbing him of even these remaining few. He knew that, over a period whose end he could not glimpse, his task was no longer to cure but to diagnose. To detect, to see, to describe, to register, and then condemn—that was his present function. Sometimes a woman would clutch his sleeve, crying shrilly: “Doctor, you’ll save him, won’t you?” But he wasn’t there for saving life; he was there to order a sick man’s evacuation. How futile was the hatred he saw on faces then! “You haven’t a heart!” a woman told him on one occasion. She was wrong; he had one. It saw him through his twentyhour day, when he hourly watched men dying who were meant to live. It enabled him to start anew each morning. He had just enough heart for that, as things were now (Camus 1991, 160).

If the existential crisis is deep, the work is no longer about roles. They are no longer doctors who have a role to play – their own specialization within the health system – they are all fighters for life. Even Rieux no longer feels like a doctor – his goal is not to treat, but to make a diagnosis and survive. Now it is about solidarity, a collective revolt by people with certain medical abilities (who are often just as futile) who together fraternally face the absurd. In the case of Dr. Rieux, his revolt is more isolated, more Sisyphean. In the novel we find a form of collective revolt captured in the form of a chronicle, but also the loneliness of the characters. It is the motive of loneliness that is one of the debatable characteristics of *The Plague* (Gray 2007, 165). Even in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, we encounter stories of doctors and nurses who are separated from their families. This crisis shakes any given sense of role, but it increases humanity, which – through the human nature – recognizes life as the only value. The COVID-19 crisis has shown a dramatic form of crisis for doctors, managers, and for all of us. As Farr (2020) shows, we are all Dr. Rieux – we are forced to face the existential anxieties resulting from the absurd conditions of the pandemic, but the awareness of this absurdity has certain therapeutic effects – it gives us the power to fight. As Franco-Paredes (2020) notes “Camus reminds us that we can never be mentally or fully prepared for pandemics”. Every crisis requires a new, original solution, a new effort by the existential manager (Odiome 1966). Qualitative research based on interviews with managers also shows that even in the case of Asia, where people have experience with previous epidemics such as SARS, they find themselves in a completely new situation (Müller, 2020b).

But managers often face similar crises during their career because there are times when the role they have played is not enough. It is necessary to do much more – to rediscover humanity and give a chance to other people, to shake a predetermined meaning (see movements of existence by Patočka 1996, and its explanation in the context of management by Müller and Jedličková, 2020). If a crisis does not break a person and they are able to push the stone constantly upwards in a Sisyphean way, they become stronger. As it was pointed out in the previous sections, the crisis has a positive dimension. Further research in the field of existential hermeneutic phenomenology focused on studying the lived experience of managers shows that even the current COVID-19 crisis can be considered as meaning-creating. An example is a manager in the field of real estate management who, thanks to this crisis, was able to appreciate the importance of her work. She went from a level where she felt like an employee to a level

where she felt like a manager with a degree of responsibility. Critical moments are important for the process of becoming a manager – they form the identity of the manager (Müller, 2020b).

It is obvious that every crisis can be associated with new possibilities and seeing new contexts. The current confrontation with death that is similar to other disasters in the history of the twentieth century will lead to recognizing the importance of existentially oriented approaches. Camus's work can be understood as a symbol of the current return to these approaches, because as Banerjee et al. (2020) discuss, Camus's work recalls the absurdity of death and the resulting anxiety and its role in social response.

Research questions in this area relate to “How managers make sense of their experiences during critical moments?”, “What is it like to be a Sisyphus who is constantly forced to undergo recurring critical moments?”, “What is needed for a person to learn to live in absurd conditions?”, “In important situations, do we need a person in their complete being, or can we be content with the roles they hold?”, “How does the crisis bring us back to realizing our full existence?”, and “Where is the limit of tolerable absurdity?”. As Camus says, it is necessary to say “yes” and “no” at the same time to absurd and difficult conditions. This is better illustrated by another important idea – avoiding idealistic constructs and the middle way.

Avoiding Idealistic Constructs and the Middle Way

Camus's style of thinking, which rejects extremism and excessive adherence to meaning and extreme belief in its fulfilment, could be characterized as “flow to success in the middle way”. Pascale (1978) used this term to analyse the influence of Eastern philosophy, especially Zen Buddhism, on management. As Müller and Kubátová (2021) show, these Eastern ideas are close to Western existentially oriented philosophical thinking, especially to the work of Albert Camus. At the same time, this concept of the middle way is closely related to the previous topic of repeating crises.

Pascale (1978) noted the difference between the Eastern and Western conceptions of decision-making. While the Western manager is a representative of strength and determination, which is tied to a firm vision, the Eastern manager tends to choose when confronted with difficult trade-offs. In this eastern view of the manager's situation, it can be stated that there are no definitive solutions to problems, as the situations associated with the constant need to choose exacerbates the feeling of incompleteness. The Eastern manager does not have everything under control and is heading for success in a certain cycle. In this respect, he mentions the motifs of cyclicity that we also find in Camus's Sisyphus. However, remaining in a constant cycle does not mean suffering. Pascale likens it to a coral reef that always survives a typhoon without trying to avoid it and yet survives. As mentioned by Müller and Kubátová (2021), we find the concept of the middle way in Eastern management in other contexts. This is, for example, the level of interpersonal relationships between leaders, followers, and the prevention of excessive dependence (Vu and Gill 2019), the issue of well-being (Brahmagunabhorn 2016), or the issue of consumption within sustainable development (Daniels 2007).

All of these approaches are close to the basic style of Camus's thinking. The creation of goals and plans, as well as the confrontation with absurd conditions in the organization, as aptly described by Blomme (2014), cannot be connected with the idealistic construct to which society would be directed. Contrary to other types of existentialism, Camus shows that something of the absurd must be preserved, because its complete removal is dangerous. While existentialists seek an escape from life in contradictions, Camus seeks a way to live with these

contradictions. It is a middle way – the position of constant revolt (Camus 1979). This revolt is connected with the idea of relativity – it is not a revolution that seeks something definitive (Thody 1959, 24).

Camus applied these ideas, in the area of his political philosophy and journalistic commitment, to a vigorous struggle against violence, oppression, and all forms of totalitarianism (Camus 1991a, 2006). However, Camus's middle stance was not a very strong political position, as evidenced by his involvement in efforts to mediate a peaceful dialogue in the Algerian war (Guérin 2013, 254; Dominguez 2015, 5).

These considerations lead to interesting research questions concerning the application of the middle way in management. It is a problem of defining certain boundaries in creating organizational goals, fulfilling them, and trying to face absurd conditions. We can recognize the boundary from above (setting goals) and from below (succumbing to anarchy and to absurd conditions). In the context of defining the upper limit, research questions arise, such as “To what extent is the blind fulfilment of organizational goals without a thorough observation of the consequences of this action?” and “What are the real consequences of fulfilling goals in terms of conditions and dignity of individual human beings outside the organization?”. The lower limit then concerns revolt – rebellion against absurd conditions. “To what extent is the organization subject to absurd conditions?”, or “How to set conditions within the organization so that they are tolerable, but also so that the position of revolt does not degenerate into a revolution leading to blind fulfilment of the ideal?”. It is clear, that these issues are very closely related to the ethical field.

Value of Life as Basis for Business Ethics

For Camus, there is a basis for ethical behaviour – it is the value of human life. When we talked about the boundaries of the middle way in the previous section, both boundaries concerned people and life. The position associated with excessive absurdity – resignation and inability to rebel, threatens human dignity, or life itself. The position associated with the belief in the ideal and its blind, often fanatical fulfilment, diminishes the value of individual human life, because in the name of this, the ideal person and their needs are overlooked.

Human nature should not be reduced to mere economic relations and roles. In his political philosophy, Camus shows how totalitarian regimes presupposed the formability of human nature. Communist ideology in the name of a distant higher good – the liberation of humanity through organized planned production (see Engels 1880) – ultimately enslaves humanity.

Absolute revolution, in fact, supposes the absolute malleability of human nature and its possible reduction to the condition of a historical force. But rebellion, in man[sic], is the refusal to be treated as an object and to be reduced to simple historical terms. It is the affirmation of a nature common to all men, which eludes the world of power (Camus 1991a, 250).

Revolt defines a fundamental value and creates a limit beyond which any oppression threatens the dignity of all people. The revolting person rebels in the name of a common human identity. The revolt shows that freedom has its limits, which are related to the value of human life. Human life is the basic criterion that defines the acceptability of our actions. While the revolution refers to unattainable future values, regardless of current human conditions, the revolt concerns the present, for it is clear to the person revolting that a happy future for

humanity cannot emerge from the suffering, intimidation, or degradation of humanity (Müller 2020a). According to Camus (1991a, 304) “real generosity toward the future lies in giving all to the present,” and the merit rebellion “lies in making no calculations, distributing everything it possesses to life and to living men[sic]”.

As Blomme (2014) described the situation, Camus’s thinking can give us an insight into what it means to be a person in an organization. Just as it is important for Camus (2006) in the political context to maintain a life-giving dialogue – and to speak the language of a common humanity – communication and interpersonal relationships are essential in the organization. It is this dialogue within the organization that helps people share their needs regarding their humanity, and it is the basis for revolt against crimes against their dignity. Kelly and Kelly also note the importance of the communication process as part of their existential approach to the organization. Existential approaches emphasize awareness and authenticity, which lead to “a meeting of minds that would lead to a good society where people can find dignity again” (Kelly and Kelly 1998, 38) in the communication process.

In the context of these considerations, there are several ethical questions inspired by the work of Albert Camus: “To what extent is human nature degraded in the organization where human beings are treated only as work roles?”, “How does a lack of communication lead to a deterioration of human conditions in the organization and a loss of dignity?”, “Is the criterion of the value of human life sufficient for the ethical dilemmas in the organization?” and a number of other related issues.

Conclusion

In this article, Camus’s work was placed in the context of existential management and it has been shown that Camus’s thinking differs from existentialism, especially Sartre-type existentialism that claims there is no human nature and that human existence precedes essence. In the case of Albert Camus, it is different – human nature plays an important social and political role. It could be said that the absurd – the confrontation of human desires and the reality of the world – and the revolt – the never-ending rebellion against violence, oppression, and bad conditions, represent two components of human nature that we find in Camus’s work. The concept of the absurd and the revolt are interconnected. The absurd cannot be overcome, denied, or erased from the world because it has fundamental and very dramatic consequences – its removal leads to the adoption of dangerous ideological constructs that degrade a person and their dignity.

In existential management, the most frequently commented motif on Camus’s work is the motif of Sisyphus. Existential management works with the situationality of a manager who finds himself in constant crises and new case studies requiring original solutions. Camus’s metaphor of Sisyphus is important in that even critical situations have a positive dimension – we can imagine that the manager is happy. It is not just a scorn of the inhuman fate, but also a heroic rebellion, an act of revolt. The revolt, as we see it in Camus’s later work, is not just a revolt of the individual – the lone Sisyphus, but it is a collective revolt, which concerns the solidarity struggle for human conditions. Camus’s approach – which highlights the importance of the absurd and critical moments – is important for management. Managerial work is characterized by constantly overcoming crises that develop the competencies of the manager. It is a constant process of becoming a manager – a revolt against Sisyphean conditions.

It was further discussed that an inspiring element of Camus's work is holding a middle position – avoiding extremes. This idea has its similarities in Eastern “existentially” oriented management. Human nature and its manifestations – absurd and revolt, set a clear limit for our actions. This limit concerns the value of human life, which brings us to the ethical dimension of Camus's work. Rather than a clear guide to management, Camus's work offers interesting inspirations for research in the field of existential management. It can encourage suggestions for formulating questions in qualitative research and enrich interpretive frameworks for the analysis of the obtained data.

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