

QUALITATIVE STUDY OF ROMANIAN MANAGERS' IDENTITY

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Abstract: The article presents the process of grounding a theory about Romanian managers' identity. It shows the manner in which the stages of data collection, data analysis and sampling have been conceived and implemented. It also describes in detail the decisions taken in each of these stages (the choice of methods and techniques, their combining and so on), the procedures followed and the difficulties encountered. The research was done in 2008 having as subjects 20 Romanian managers; it aimed at identifying identity aspects which are typical to managers. The article is based on the idea that describing the way in which the findings were reached is as important as expressing the conclusions themselves. It shows that qualitative research is suitable in understanding managerial aspects.

Keywords: qualitative research, grounded theory, methodological reflexivity, self-identity, managers.

1. Introduction

The article describes part of the process of a qualitative research (which was the basis of my PhD dissertation), conducted in 2008 in Romania and having managers as subjects. I believe that to show the way in which the conclusions were reached is as important as expressing the conclusions themselves. I will present in detail the procedures through which the conclusions were reached, to enter the inner mechanisms of research and show what takes place in the backstage.

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I think the researcher should show openly how the methods and techniques of collecting, analyzing and interpreting data are applied. This way, the research procedures (in this case the qualitative ones) will be open to criticism, growth and improvement. I will therefore present the research methodology that has led to the identification of the identity condition of the Romanian managers I studied.

2. Preliminary Aspects of Research

The identity, as it has been approached in this article refers to personal identity (or individual identity), the one offered by the personal definitions of self, by self-identification; it is self-identity, the identity for the self or subjective identity (depending on the author it defines).

The identity issue possesses in this study the status of what is called in literature "sensitizing concept" (a concept taken from Herbert Blumer). This means "the manner in which symbolical interactionists (and generally speaking, qualitative researchers) use the concepts in their research. Socio-psychological concepts such as family, victim, stress, stigma, and so on are defined in a loosened manner at the beginning of the study; they are not given operational definitions so that the researcher could explore the way in which the concept manifests and how it is given a particular meaning in the set of circumstances which are being investigated" (Schwandt 2007:274).

Hence, I started from a basic definition of identity. In *Dictionary of Sociology* Gadrey (1998) defines identity as a body of circumstances that make a person be that actual person. I tried to identify which are the circumstances in which Romanian managers lived (resulted from their life stories). Besides the abstraction of identity starting from the definition of life circumstances, managers' identity was outlined through the identification of several identity-related concepts in their discourse, as well as of some processes of the self, already known

and defined in the specialty literature (e.g. self-image, self-esteem, individual identification and collective identification).

Psycho-sociological researches regarding managers did not appeal to scientists in Romania, or at least no results have been published (I have been in touch with prospective studies regarding entrepreneurs' behavior – on individuals that never held such positions). There is no scientific information regarding the way the managers are in Romania; all we know is from the common level of knowledge. International studies on the identity of managers have been realized mainly through the sole application of inventories, tests or measuring scales; the researches were based on quantitative principles, the results were figures and profiles of different dimensions of identity.

Recently, there have been realized widespread researches having as subjects, the managers. Bennis and Nanus in 1995, for example, have realized 90 interviews of high successful managers. Also, Hofstede in 1980 realized a research of more than 50,000 managers from more than 40 countries.

Existing international studies – related to managers and their performance – have concentrated on the stocktaking of a manager's necessary abilities to become competitive and on the construction of training programs to their development. In general, the leading abilities have been more profoundly studied, and the majority of these studies have barely reached the subject of self-identity.

An increased interest in individual identity theories and in this field is noticed only after the 1990s. In 1999, Lord, Brown and Freiberg approach the subject of the self in the relation leader – subordinate; van Knippenberg and Hogg, in 2003 describe the role of identity processes in group and organizations, while Luhrmann and Eberl (2007) analyze the molding of identity in the interaction between leader and subordinate.

Levinson and Rosenthal (apud Bass 1990) have discovered that the business leaders have strong self-opinions and ideals. Many studies back up the idea that “the higher the level occupied, the greater the satisfaction level at the working place”. Less successful managers get lesser satisfaction out of their work and have less spare time for their family and relaxation” (Courpasson and Dany 2009).

As a result of studies realized in an area of psychological interest, Zeleznik (1998:71-2) concludes: “managers prefer working with people; they avoid individual work as this makes them nervous” or that “managers lack empathy or the ability to intuitively feel others’ feelings”. As well, there are interviews with managers on different hierarchical levels “focusing on their career and covering aspects as why did they do important job changes, the perception of self-value or barriers in their careers” (Wajcman and Martin 2002:989).

There are also recent researches that try to apply qualitative methodology in the study of managers (*see* Down 2006). Ford (2010) made an “exploration of the narrated lives and experiences of managers charged with responsibilities as leaders in a UK local government organization” (p. 47). Watson (2008) used “a rare combination of ethnographic, autobiographical and interview research material” in order to illustrate the “identity work” of two managers. Thomas and Linstead (2002) performed a “qualitative, inductive, multi-method approach” (p. 76) to analyze the process of identity construction of 150 middle managers in 50 organizations. There is a study proposing in-depth interviews of 20 Dutch managers belonging to different religious groups that inductively present their conceptualization of God, their principles and values as well as the way they run the business (Graafland et al. 2007) and one proposing semi-structured interviews with leaders of big organizations (of more than 500 members) whose purpose is to identify the way leaders speak of them (French and Simpson 2006).

In Central-East Europe there is Pavlica and Thorpe's (1998) study that "examines what Czech managers think about themselves and their roles, and contrasts these perceptions with those of their British counterparts" and a recent Slovenian study of Širec and Močnik (2012) regarding gender specifics in entrepreneurs' personal characteristics. They wanted to find if the psychological motivation factors differ between male and female Slovenian entrepreneurs.

Returning to my research, since I was interested in a very personal phenomenon, which can be identified within "the life story", I decided that the most adequate manner of conducting the research is qualitative methodology. I therefore tried to discover which the managers' self-identity features are.

Qualitative research involves knowing very well one's subjects and also investing time in knowing them. Since this would have been very difficult, on one hand for the manager to give the time necessary to achieve an openness large enough to collect valuable data and on the other hand for me to have the necessary time to establish a relationship with dozens of subjects, I decided to use delegated interviewers. Each fieldworker was in charge with the data collection from a single subject (whom he/she knew to a greater or lesser extent – as a relative, friend, acquaintance or who had been recommended to him/her by someone close). I think the fact I choose to collect data with this kind of interviewers was a good decision. Managers are people with no spare time – but it is more difficult to refuse an acquaintance; it is uncomfortable to talk about personal issues – but less with a friend; it is likely to lie, to hide unpleasant aspects about you – but less with a relative who knows you well and so on.

3. Data Collection

The collection of data in qualitative research is achieved with observation, interview or by collecting social documents. Observation is usually applied in the natural environment (field observation), being uncontrolled, unstructured, intensive.

I used this method in collecting data from managers. Thus, the delegated interviewers were instructed to record observation data related to the environment where the interview was held (if it was the environment where the subject was living or working), but especially related to the subject's state of mind during the interview (when do they get emotional, what kind of topics irritates them, which subjects bother them and so on). The observation was unstructured because we did not use any a priori guide trying to describe the context relevant for the research. We let the spontaneous and the authentic medium to guide us. We did not ask for the managers to do things in order for us to observe them and we manage to be aware of more than the way managers were dressed, for example. These observational techniques are consonant with the qualitative research desire for comprehension, natural, inductive.

Most data were collected through interviews. The techniques applied have been (in the order of their implementation): the unstructured, the semi-structured and the structured interview.

The subjects were informed that this had to do with a PhD thesis about managers, that there were more subjects, who were being approached for discussion and expected to talk about themselves and their lives. They were assured that the data was confidential, that the documents collected would bear code names.

The first interview with each manager was an unstructured one (there are authors – see Patton 2002:349, who call this technique an informal conversational interview because the questions “are out of the immediate context, there is no topic or question appearance predetermination”). Thus, the interviewers were instructed not to guide the subject (see also Miller 2000:114, who argues that “the initial interview will be as non-directive and non-focused as possible”). In order to respect the requirements of qualitative research, I decided that the subjects know best what is important or significant to say about them. I considered

that what the subject chose to recount is much more significant (and closer to what the subject is and to what represents him) than anything the interviewer could have asked.

In the first stage of the qualitative research you have no clue about what is relevant to ask (you can ask anything, you can have even a structured guide, but how do you know if you ask the right questions?). The right questions come from the attempt to measure indicators of the concept operationalization which you made in order to test hypotheses. In a qualitative study you don't know from the start what you should look for in the field, you don't have hypotheses so the right choice is the unstructured interview.

The subjects were told from the beginning that a new method of data collection will be applied to them, in which the interviewee plays the main part (he knows better than the interviewer what to say and whatever he tells us is more adequate than anything we would think to ask him). They were asked to speak about themselves; this was the initial requirement; no other requirement was mentioned during the interview; we encouraged however the stories about themselves on different periods of life: childhood, teenage, adulthood.

I anticipated a difficulty related to this type of interviewing (and in most cases the delegated interviewers actually faced them). The subjects (at least the Romanian ones) are used with questionnaires or interviews with precise questions and are confused when are asked to speak freely. Delegated interviewers had been instructed to encourage them by telling them that what they consider worth saying is good enough. In the situation that the subject failed to speak freely, he/she was directed to the periods mentioned in the previous paragraph. I quote an example (the beginning of the interview M8 – woman, 40 years old):

Interviewer: *Speak about yourself.*

M8: *I think I'd rather be asked something than start myself.*

Interviewer: *Anything that you say is important.*

M8: *But what do you want me to tell you about myself? How I started, how I arrived to be what I am, if... what?*

Interviewer: *Anything that you consider important.*

M8: *I have to say that I consider my entire life important. And also why I arrived to develop a business to support myself... What can I tell you? That I am a single mother and single manager, also that I am a single woman. What should I tell you? I don't know... Help me!*

Interviewer: *Then, tell me something about your childhood.*

The data collected in qualitative research have to be rich, broad, deep, to capture essences and shades. That is why the subjects' discourse has to be focused on details, information-rich, and full of the most detailed and seemingly insignificant aspects. Interviewers had been told that they should not be satisfied with short, vague or imprecise answers such as "I had a beautiful childhood"; that they have to encourage the subject to recount by asking questions that elicit stories such as: what did he/she liked to do as a child, what kind of friends he/she had, what was the most unpleasant or, on the contrary, the nicest thing that happened to them. This way, during the first interview, the subjects understood what sort of data we expected from them, how rich and thorough these should be.

As an interview technique we used, therefore, the narrative interview (see Flick 1998). The respondents were told that facts are also important (for instance, when and where they were born – the information with which many of subjects started their story), but that the most important things are the stories about events or small happenings that remained in their mind. Delegated interviewers were encouraged not to stop the speaker if he/she speaks freely, but just to lead them back to the subject if the discourse touches topics that have no relation to them or their life. "A good interview, and even more so, a good life story is one in which the interviewee takes over the control of the interview situation and talks freely" (Bertaux 1981:39).

The only precise questions in the first (unstructured) interview were the clarification questions. These were made on the spot, in connection with an idea issued by the subject. Generally speaking, these questions required the subject to give more details, to explain what he/she is referring to or clarify what he/she wanted to say. For example, if the subject brought a person into discussion, the interviewer had to find out as many things as possible about this one and the role he/she played into the subject's life.

The narrative interview technique is supposed to produce data in narrative form. This technique is used in narrative researches as the biographical research (life stories, thematic biographical stories or group biographies) or the oral history. If you want your subject narrate, you have to narrate yourself (for example you narrate your first and unique question prepared – see the narrative or generative question). You must have the narrative tone when you put the question, you have to assure your subject that you are not in a hurry, you have to encourage him or her when is on the right track by moving your head, by affirmative sound like “mmm”, by words like “very interesting”, “this is exactly what I am waiting from you”; you have to keep the eye contact between the two of you, but you may also take notes (it gives your subjects the feeling that what they say is important for you, it make them responsible for what they say etc.). Our unstructured interviews were narrative; we respect all this indication except the narrative question. I thought that even the way story is told is identity relevant; thus I did not want to suggest anything, not even the story line as in generative questions asking the life division in book chapters or other structure.

The interviews followed mostly the recipe of the biographical method, described by Rosenthal (2004:50). The author speaks about the sequences of the narrative interview as follows: “The main narrative period” and the “questioning period” (internal-narrative questions – related to the things previously said and external-narrative questions – the topics that interest us but hadn't yet been mentioned). Bar-On (2006) describes this method by

concluding that the clarifying questions and also the ones interesting the interviewer follow the main narrative. This is the manner in which our interviews were conducted (the clarifying questions were conceived by me after the first interview, on the main narrative; these questions were addressed to the subjects during the second interview). There were many types of clarifying questions – those described by mentioned authors and non-narrative ones.

The delegated interviewers have been instructed to make as many unstructured interviews with their single subject as they could, until being enlightened all the stages of the subject's life. After finishing each unstructured interviews, they were transcribed and carefully studied. Clarifying questions have been prepared (in the situation the interviewer did not ask such questions during the unstructured interviews). And the next interview was a semi-structured one, made with the purpose to clarify some still ambiguous, vague, imprecise aspects. Here's an example of questions formulated on an unstructured interview (from the M15 interview – man, 28 years old), prepared to be asked in the semi-structured interview to come:

M15: *We were a large family; I had to work* [he was going to be asked what work was he forced to do], *also to learn, and go to school, too... I wasn't a good child, I used to play football the entire day and when I went home I used to get beaten* [he was going to be asked by whom].

The semi-structured interview started with a question related to the discussion in the previous interviews (if during the period between these interviews the subject has been thinking about the conversations he had had with the interviewer and had to add something to these or he remembered something he had to mention). Then the interview was slowly guided by the clarifying questions. If these clarifying questions led the subject to other happenings, people, events and so on, he/she was encouraged to recount them. If at the first stage of the research, the unstructured interview was the most appropriate one, going further I needed to

clarify some stories and to be open to new stories as well. Thus, the semi-structured interview was the appropriate choice.

The data from the unstructured and semi-structured interviews were analyzed. A structured interview guide was written based on the analyses. It aimed to collect data which had to fill the gaps in categories, to achieve the saturation of the categories identified in the data analysis stage. The analysis unfolds particular missing elements in stories; you may not be aware of them until this stage. So, only now you are prepared to go back in the field and ask the questions that will give you the information necessary in order to complete categories. This is also the time when you formulate your first interpretation propositions, when you try to confirm some suppositions. So I made a structured interview guide to test my emerging hypotheses.

The structured interview was applied on the first eleven subjects. After the analysis of their interviews, according to the needs revealed by this new analysis (newly discovered categories that had to be saturated, new or modified hypotheses that had to be confirmed and so on), the interview guide was slightly modified and applied as such to the next nine subjects. I respected the circular procedure of the qualitative research where the collecting, the analysis and the interpretation processes are made over and over again, comparing each new data with the previously gathered ones. I also followed the grounded theory process indications when I reformulated some of my hypothesis and tested them on my new subjects in order to match with each and every of my cases (see Bartlett and Payne 1997).

Thus, in data collection I used methodological triangulation- *see* Flick (1998) - (triangulation within the method – by using different techniques of the same methods; triangulation between methods – by using two different methods: observation and interview). Of course these combinations were used with the intention of reaching not only more complex and more complete data but also validity.

4. The Sampling Procedure Applied

Twenty managers were interviewed, seven women and thirteen men, aged between 26 and 69. I defined managers as people holding a leading position. I considered that someone has a leading position if he/she has at least three subordinate employees.

Regarding this position, I established (after located and interviewed the first 10 of my subjects) four categories in which the subjects could fit: team leaders; heads of departments, sectors, area; institution, organisation or business managers (in charge with the performance of the institution or business and respond to a single superior manager – the one in charge with the institution or the owner of the business); independent institutions and organisations or private businesses managers (who have no superiors).

The sampling was theoretical because, first, I searched for subjects having leading positions. Thus I interviewed managers (that happened to be team managers, heads of departments etc.). The data analysis showed me, later, that there are some differences regarding identity aspects between women managers and men managers, between team and department managers and those with higher leading positions. So I tried to select new subjects according to these findings.

Regarding the number of subjects, I stopped from sampling after reaching theoretical saturation.

5. Data Analysis

I applied the case-oriented strategy – see Huberman and Miles (1998) - (I coded the documents and I built, for each subject, a specific analytical pattern, then I compared these one with another). These patterns are descriptive or explicative models developed for each case (a specific model of the core category and its axial categories, a specific distribution of codes, some specific hypothetical propositions etc.). I modified and improved the patterns (so as to match each case) as I was comparing them with the other ones (see the analytical

induction process). Through systematic comparisons I reached valid analytical models patterns for most of the cases. The strategy of approaching the texts was the coding of the data in order to establish categories and develop theories (see the strategy of working with texts in Flick 1998).

The first method of analysis that I used was global analysis, which offered me a general perspective on the analyzed material; by using it, I made an inventory of the themes identified in the material. I used it in order to get more familiar with the text, to have information regarding the themes existing in each interview and where exactly they were to be found in these texts. I applied the method according to Flick's descriptions of it (1998). As I was reading the text, I was writing the keywords and structuring longer paragraphs by marking the central concepts or sentences.

For a thorough analysis of the field texts I made a more complex coding of them (you can explore further the terms I use in this section in Neuman 1997:418; Bartlett and Payne 1997; Flick 1998:179). Given the large amount of collected material I performed a reduction and I extracted the essential (in which ideas, meanings are concerned) through open coding (the first procedure of grounded theory coding – see Strauss and Corbin 1990).

The open coding was achieved as follows: I went through the field texts; I selected each word, phrase, or paragraph which communicated an idea, an event, an incident and so on. The technique I used was the line by line coding – the most detailed type of open coding. Each selected component was labelled and codes resulted. For most of the codes I preserved as labels precisely the subjects own words, as in the original text. I extracted over 3800 codes from all the texts collected on the field. Given the difficulty of manual analysis of such a quantity of analyze units, I used the software NVivo7 (see Gibbs 2002).

The extracted codes were compared [among themselves] and those defining the same phenomenon, containing similar ideas or describing the same event, the same person or

incident, were grouped in the same categories (being reunited under the same, more abstract, concept). Each category thus formed was labelled. The names of the categories were chosen in such a way so as to represent the codes, reunited under their “umbrella”. I used the two labelling sources: “borrowing” labels from literature (when the phenomena found in the text were describing a concept already existing in literature – such as: “self-perception”, “motivation” etc.) and that of the subjects (when some of their phrases caught my attention - for instance: “what sort of leader is followed by people”, “what makes me proud” etc.).

In addition to free categories (found in texts) I also coded the material with the help of prefabricated categories (found in identity literature). Such prefabricated categories which have guided the coding (the categories were established before the coding and under their “umbrella” appropriate codes from the texts were collected) were: “the circumstances they lived in”, the concepts of personal development – “autonomy”, “responsibility”, “potential”, “uniqueness” and so on.

After open coding I performed the next procedure of the grounded theory coding: axial coding. I aimed the development of connections between the categories I discovered. I compared categories and grouped them on the basis of different criteria. For example, according to the period: I grouped categories relating to childhood, adolescence and maturity or I assembled categories relating to staff: “relationship with one’s employees”, “what motivates the employees in the managers’ opinion”, “how should an employee be” and so on. I achieved, therefore, the organization of categories in sequences – time sequences or according to their relationship with a major topic of interest (the circumstances under which the manager has lived, the self-identification and hetero-identification, levels of identity and so on).

The categories meeting the same criteria became the subcategories of another, larger, broader, more abstract. The categories with a higher level of generality are axial categories. They received representative labels for their content. Thus I made the ranking of categories on

topics of interest. The purpose of this operation was to join categories and their corresponding codes, describing or explaining a certain identity aspect.

The data interpretation was thus made easier through immediate reference to the codes of interest (and NVivo is very effective in such tasks) and so I was no longer working with unprocessed texts. If by the use of the methods and techniques of coding the material I achieved the data reduction, through the visual presentation of data I tried to apprehend links, connections, associations. The methods and techniques of visual presentation represent the first step towards data interpretation, through the description of links, similarities and differences between categories and cases. I created both matrixes and networks (the latter also named by some authors maps – see Dey 1993).

The conceived matrices were conceptual (e.g. personal identification - with persons, groups and role identification – on columns and cases on lines), ordered by time (cases on the lines and on the main columns the categories on different life stages) or identification matrices (on the lines the cases and on the columns the variables of identification of each case – the manager's type, gender and age). I also worked with matrices on datasets in order to compare not only the cases between themselves but also to groups of cases. I designed sets of data (arranged as lines in the matrix) focused on attributes: gender (male/female), type of manager (team leader / head of department / top manager), age (young - 26-39; adults - 40-49; seniors - 50-69).

Each axial category (with the appropriate subcategories) was graphically represented through networks. Between categories and subcategories I defined different relationships (which have been graphically represented through specific symbols – in NVivo one can edit many types of relationships). For instance: *associated with*, *determining*, *determine each other*, *is similar to*, *it can be related to*, *leads to* etc.

After achieving the open and axial coding I also performed selective coding (the last process of grounded theory coding). Basically, I found the central (core) categories, around which I gathered the other categories. I obtained one core category for each goal of my research. For instance: for the objective - “which were the circumstances in which the managers have lived?”, I developed the core category: “identity as a set of circumstances”; for the objective – “which are the managers’ ideas and feelings related to their own person?”, I developed the core category: “identity as ideas and feelings about oneself” and so on.

Here is an example of core category: the circumstances in which managers lived divided in “childhood and adolescence period” and “maturity period”. The childhood and adolescence period has the following subcategories: “physic”, “relational”, “school”, “familial” and “financial” medium. The maturity period has the following subcategories: “professional circumstances” – “professional medium characteristics”, “their reaction to the professional medium”, “the others’ reaction to them”, “ideal job” and “professional self definition”; “relational circumstances” – “acquaintances”, “friends”, “other people”, “subordinates”, “life models”. Each of these has some subcategories and/or lots of codes.

Thus I achieved a conceptualization of identity starting from the general theoretical definitions and exclusively on the field texts. Given the fact that the process of open coding has not been theoretically guided, there were also some free identity categories (which have not been comprehended in the conceptualization of identity as it was defined in theory). These were studied separately under specific objectives generated by the data analysis and which complete the definition of managers’ identity. Basically one can speak of a general central category which is the managers’ identity and of core categories, which reveal different aspects of managers’ identity (designed either on the basis of definitions of identity in literature or on data analysis).

Boyatzis (1998) lists three ways of developing themes of analysis in qualitative research: data guided coding (developing themes and codes by using the inductive method), theory guided coding (developing themes and codes by using theory and the application of codes by using it as a point of depart) and coding guided by previous research. I performed the theory guided and the data guided coding.

Methodological triangulation was also used for data analysis. I combined techniques and methods for a deeper understanding of text, for reduction of the material as accurate as possible, for increased validity of the findings.

Besides the mentioned methods and techniques I also used the analysis tools provided by the software NVivo 7: coding facilities such as *in vivo* coding, construction of sets of documents or categories, the frequency of words, word or text search facilities, search by categories (comparing the codes from the categories on different sets of data), search by attributes (finding specific codes for categories, on certain attributes), combined search, by text, categories and attributes (see Gibbs 2002).

6. Grounding the theory

For data interpretation (the grounding of a theory on the basis of empirical data analysis), I performed analytical induction. The empirically founded theory is not *a priori* generated and tested afterwards, but inductively derived from the collected and analyzed data; it is discovered, developed and verified during research (see Bartlett and Payne 1997).

Because the purpose of research is finding answers to questions (objectives), the first step of analytical induction is formulating responses to these questions. At first there are answering attempts, intuitions (which are expressed from the first analyses of the text, even from first approaches of the field text). These attempts are provisional and permanently subject to verification, comparison with new answers and insights generated by the sequent

analysis of texts. The initial insights are usually completed or modified [later] and sometimes even annulled by the new data discoveries.

Here are some of the initial insights I formulated after the analysis of the first interviews about the way managers perceive themselves: they have a very good opinion about themselves, they perceive themselves as very ambitious, superior to others, special. These are statements based on the self-presentation of the interviewees (their discourses are full of expressions sustaining these assertions): *I'm with a step before others; any decision I made was the best one; I succeeded only due to my ambition; I was, the only woman in the country, engineer in the car construction industry; I'm different; I'm unique in my way* etc.

The initial insights became the first hypotheses. Here are some of those formulated after the analysis of the first ten interviews (I could find in my subject discourses feelings, events or actions that lead to propositions like this):

- Respect and appreciation from other people are very important motivating factors for managers.
- They admire the successful ones, “steal” from others’ successful professional behavior.
- Among other children they often play leader parts (have initiatives, invent games, establish rules).
- They had at least one authoritative parent.
- They have performed in childhood all sorts of paid works and managed the money they’ve earned.
- They don’t speak much about failures and regrets.

These are generalized propositions deduced from my subjects’ declarations. They say they were leaders in children playing groups; they had a severe parent and so on. Every such declaration was followed by a proof experience story. As a researcher I made an inventory of

such similar assertions found in the discourse of the most of my subjects. I sought, as any interpretative researcher does, to discover “recurring structural, interactional, and meaning patterns” (Denzin 2001:65).

The analytical induction process implies the study of each case in the light of the expressed hypotheses (to determine their suitability to each case). If the hypothesis does not suit a case, it is either reformulated to suit the deviant case and so remain also valid for the previously studied cases, either the phenomenon investigated is redefined in order to exclude the negative case. Thus, I analyzed the deviant cases (those that did not match, which were not consistent with the hypothetical model). I sought to express hypotheses valid for most of the cases as well as to develop the theory in the direction of deviant cases.

Here are some of my grounded theory propositions about Romanian managers’ identity. You can find extensive results in Scârneci (2011a; 2011b).

Life circumstances I found similar in my subjects’ discourses about themselves that may contribute to the development of people as managers are as follows: they live in an authoritarian familial environment; they are assigned responsibilities from an early age; they have contact from an early age with jobs practiced by parents, other relatives or acquaintances, jobs that they themselves try; they earn money from an early age and administrate it themselves; along life they have a lot of jobs starting from ground and promoting steadily; they are acquainted to a lot of people but they can rely on very few; they feel that others persecute, envy or admire them. All of these are facts narrated spontaneously by most of my subjects in a way or another; for example they list most of their previous jobs and I concluded that they had a lot of jobs and analyzing its characteristics (from secretary or assistant to head of a department and so on) I concluded that they started from ground etc.

The circumstances in which had lived the future Romanian managers are no special circumstances. I think that lots of people that did not become managers can identify their own

life's circumstances in those enumerated in the previous paragraph. I think that what really gives specificity to future managers is the reaction they have to context or medium. It is about their response strategy to the medium which belongs to a scheme of personal development; they act as a response to circumstances in a manner of growing their human, social and professional potential. This is a researcher interpretation resulted from the patterns I discovered in data (including some succession patterns, some confessed action effects inventory, some motivational patterns).

For example, as a response to the not very rich environment of their past life, the future managers assume their responsibilities and work from an early age. They do not fail to learn from their masters, nor pass by without displaying the important lessons learned from their parents or teachers. Then, they change their work place, from one activity to another in the search for a better salary that they know they deserve, in the search for the acknowledgment of personal value, but mostly in the search of challenging tasks, of bigger responsibilities. Most of the managers begin with humiliating or under-skilled tasks and, even though, they learn and become more ambitious with each new job offered. In their relation with the others, they are very rational: they look for the company of those who fuel their personal trust.

The interpretation process is in permanent contact and control with the theoretical statements and with the past findings of the domain. Here is an example of theoretical guiding of the data interpretation in my study. The self-esteem is a concept with many definitions in the socio-psychological literature. One of them can be found in Crocker and Bylsma (1996) theory. According to it the high self-esteem is associated with small discrepancies between the self-conception of the individual (what he / she thinks is true about him / her) and his / her ideal (wanted or hoped). And there are small discrepancies between the self-conception and the ideal-self of my subjects. Not only they are satisfied with what they are, but they don't

wish they were someone or something else, they don't wish to be in the future any different they are now: *I wish, ten years from now, to still be management director.*

Another proof of the high level of the self-esteem (see Crocker and Bylsma) is the fact that the studied managers devalue the negative attributes they possess (in their narratives about themselves you can find few flaws, and those few are not serious and are recognized smiling or laughing, with so much indulgence) and also devalue the positive attributes they don't possess (there are no positive attributes they talk about but not possess, they are not talking about how they wish to be and they are not). Devaluing the negative attributes they possess is accomplished, for example, by the language they use: the laziness is confessed by the expression "lazy cricket" rousing sympathy; other flaws they possessed are considered as characteristics of the whole human kind (diminishing its importance or gravity): *I think that everybody has that thing somewhere in his / her blood; some more, others less.* Those negative attributes are used in self-handicapping for increasing their credit for success (another phenomenon found at high self-esteem persons - see Crocker and Bylsma). For example, even he is lazy, my subject wanted me to know that he manage to reach amazing performances by sustaining personal effort.

There are issues I find about my subjects that confirm the existing studies. For example the high level of self-confidence in regard to their abilities, the tendency "to update" their self, or the fact that the higher the level occupied, the greater their satisfaction level at the working place. There are issues I find that add up some characteristics to those existing in previous studies. For example, managers prefer working with other, but this is not only a preference, it is a motivational dependency; they truly lack empathy, but they have the feeling that they really know what the other feel, need or are motivating of. There are issues that contradict the existing western findings and confirm some of the eastern ones. For example I discovered some differences between female and male managers (in self-identification):

regarding their attitude towards discipline, females say they are clean and tidy, disciplined, serious and hard-working, whereas male managers try to discipline themselves but they are relaxed, lazy, non-conformist, undisciplined; women say about them that are severe to themselves, self-criticizing and perfectionist, while men say they are severe to others, cold and prudent. There are also issues completely new for the literature (for example childhood circumstances I mentioned).

One of the most debated issues regarding the qualitative research is the possibility to extend the results obtained from very few subjects to others. Here is not the place to discuss the problem but I want to say that I was amazed to discover deep similarities between the self-identity of my subjects and that of some British managers a read about. This is Ford's (2010) subject words but these sentences are similar with many other formulated by my subjects: "I organize all the games and I used to orchestrate the school games and everybody did what I said all of the time" (p. 54). Or she "could never turn her mind off from solving work related issues" (p. 55), or she "depicts her career progression as a slow and steady rise through the career hierarchy", or "her (family) life outside work takes second place to the demands at work, where holidays have to be postponed as work demands take precedence". And Watson (2009:437) subject's words are almost identical with my subjects' words: I was "a child from a poor home" and "I learned all sorts of lessons from observing others and from taking various 'hard knocks' in life".

I wonder how similar the life experiences of the eastern and western managers are; I know someone else already had the idea to compare those managers (see Pavlica and Thorpe 1998) but they were referring to the social identity perceptions not to the personal identity ones. And I wonder if there are life circumstances that predict someone's potential to become a manager (if we can find and manage some experiences that can transform ordinary people in leading persons).

7. Conclusion

The resulting grounded theory refers to the identity aspects of managers: the circumstances in which they lived, manners of self-identification, features of the self and identity expression processes.

I will make in conclusion some remarks about the methodologies of identity study. The quantitative research methodology catches the static, the here and now identity. But identity and self are processes, they are built and rebuilt permanently over time, and only the qualitative research methodology can catch this kind of evolution. The quantitative research of identity uses structured methods and techniques (experiments, questionnaires surveys, attitude scales, structured interviews and observations, content analysis). You can ask yourself if such an approach can reach a rather subjective phenomenon like self-identity. The standardization of the research instruments comes with the risk of omitting essential aspects in the identity study (I question the construct validity of a deductive operationalization of the identity concept). The validity is considered weak too because of the a-priori formulation of the answers in collecting instruments (these cannot catch totally and reliable the delicate aspects of identity). The structured methods raise the problem of the different meaning, significance of the same word, sentence or question attributed by different subjects. In the identity study case, this limit is even more obvious because the issues approached are rather abstract and complex.

Even though the qualitative research methodology has overcome some of the quantitative shortcomings in studying identity, it has some of its own. The most important one is subjectivity: the one of the researcher – analyzing and interpreting data; and the one of the subjects – constructing and even inventing data. You can ask how you can verify the statements of the subjects about themselves (the distinction between the narrative and the factual truth). Then nobody's biography is as coherent, logic and structured as the biographic

narrative (the biographical illusion). And then you can ask how much of the story told by the subjects is socially and culturally determined.

Discussing the methodologies is essential. I think that the detailed presentation of the research methodology applied also describes the value of the results obtained; that these can be this way better judged and valued; that the researcher becomes more exposed to the positive criticism of the research community. I therefore conclude that the detailed description of the methods and techniques applied in research bring only benefits both to the researcher and the research community, both to the qualitative methodology and the social sciences in general.

The novelty brought by the research described is the study of the Romanian managers' identity. It is important to bring the Romanian subjects near those from other Central and East-European countries, to know if they are different from others, if they perceive themselves like other managers do.

Most of the managers' identity studies in literature are quantitative approaches; most frequent used methods and techniques are structured ones like questionnaires or structured interviews; the managers' identity is most often illustrated by numbers, tables and statistical coefficients. I tried to study it applying life stories interviews, I tried to let the managers speak in order to better understand who they are, I tried to focus my attention on details, on feelings and this way I hope I made the managers' identity studies more complete. My article is a response to the need of "more subjectivist interpretations of managerial lives" (Ford 2010:47) proclaimed by some researchers. Those researchers think also that the perpetuation of quantitative studies on leadership brought some disadvantages like creating the illusion that "the truth is out there and through objective data collection and analysis this truth will be realized" (p. 48). I tried to show that subjective data are also valuable, complementary to the objective one.

The subjective identity, the personal one was less studied than the social identity in Central and East-Europe. My research focuses on the individual identity stressing more the managers' life happenings than the social categories in which they feel they belong. Then the cultural influences on the managerial behavior were well argued, but managers' life circumstances and lived experiences were not much in the researchers' attention. My study is an invitation to compare them in order to understand the way a manager became a manager.

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