

ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND MANAGEMENT IN ROMANIANS' PROVERBS

Cezar SCARLAT¹

Acest articol are la bază observația că numeroase proverbe evidențiază trăsăturile antreprenoriale ale oamenilor, indiferent de țara în care se află. Totuși, în pofida elementelor comune, diferite persoane își exprimă în mod diferit experiența de viață. În mod surprinzător, principiile de dată relativ recentă ale managementului au corespondenți în proverbele popoarelor. În lucrare se trec în revistă unele elemente ale culturii antreprenoriale și manageriale – pe de o parte – și semnificația unor proverbe ale românilor – pe de alta. Articolul este parte a unui proiect de cercetare mai vast, sursă pentru studii comparative.

The prerequisites of this paper are based on the observation that numerous proverbs are emphasizing the people's entrepreneurial features, regardless the country of origin. However, amid the commonality, different people have their own way to express history-long life experience. Surprisingly, the relatively new management principles have interesting correspondents in peoples' proverbs. This paper aims at analyzing the correspondence between elements of entrepreneurship and management culture – on one hand – and the meaning of Romanian proverbs – on the other. This paper is part of more extensive work initiated by the author on the above subject as well as base for comparative studies.

Key words: entrepreneur, entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial skills, management principles, Romanian proverbs

1. Introduction: Short history for collections of Romanian proverbs

The oldness of the Romanian proverbs is not the purpose of our research. However, the long life of the proverbs partly explains how the businesses and related organisations were successfully managed – many-many centuries before the time by when the modern management was born – based on 'only' common sense, experience and best practice, and continually transmitted along the generations. The proverbs are one of the most significant means to synthesize, concentrate, distillate and treasure this generations-long life experience. What is certainly true is that the proverbs are considerably older than the modern management science. A remarkable book demonstrates that there are proverbs in even Bible, which have an older origin – Egyptian, Sumerian or Babylonian [1, pg. 41-43).

¹ Professor, Department of Management, University "Politehnica" of Bucharest, ROMANIA

As far as the Romanian proverbs, part of the Romanian culture, the same author quotes scientific evidences for origins that start back in millenniums VI-III BC. The first considerable collection of Romanian proverbs belongs to Iordache Golescu (about 1827-1845): 18,366 proverbs in 854 handwritten pages [2]. Most of these proverbs (16,351) were taken by Iuliu A. Zanne and made accessible to the public in the 8th Volume (1900) of his monumental work in ten volumes [3].

Anton Pann (1847) has collected 1,144 proverbs and presented them categorized by topics in 25 groups [4]. This collection was enlarged by the author (to 3,015 proverbs) in 1852-1853. The Pann's collection is important as he initiated one of the two important developments in the proverbs literature: organizing the raw material by themes. Iuliu Zanne (1895-1903) has published over 20,000 proverbs, organized as well, by chapters and subjects as: 'physical nature', animals, man/woman and human body, 'physical life', social life, historical proverbs, religion, intellectual life and ethics, philosophy².

Nicolae Densusianu (1874) has used a selection of 25 Romanian proverbs to illustrate the legal tradition (Roman Law) within Romanian territory, well known as Dacia [5]. In more recent times, the researchers have focused on a variety of issues – from patriotic feelings [6] to people's virtues [7], or education [8] – all in Romanian and world's proverbs.

This paper is the first research work to illustrate how the entrepreneurship and management principles are reflected in Romanian proverbs.

The second important development – starting from collections of proverbs – is to produce comparative studies. In 1863, the Romanian poet George Cosbuc has written the recension to Ida von Düringsfeld's comparative study about proverbs from 83 languages and dialects – among them there were 19 Romanian proverbs [9]. There are more examples in this respect: analogous proverbs in Latin and nine modern European languages – Romanian among them [10]; Romanian proverbs and their German and French correspondents [11]; Balkan countries proverbs – 2,650 Bulgarian proverbs and their Serbian (1,330 proverbs), Turkish (1,230), Romanian (625), Greek and Albanian (330) corresponding ones [12]; Spanish and Portuguese proverbs and their Romanian correspondents [13].

This paper aims at analyzing the correspondence between elements of modern global business culture (as entrepreneurship and business management) – on one hand – and the meaning of Romanian proverbs – on the other. This is a wonderful example how folk wisdom communicates over the boundaries and centuries ...

² The ten impressive volumes completed by Zanne, over a period of about ten years, more than 100 years ago, is larger than all collections of proverbs which were published in Italy, Spain and Portugal all together, over last hundred years; and unique in the world, considering the quality of the printing [1, pg. 56].

2. Managing the business and communication in global and multi-cultural context

Romania's territory has always offered wonderful opportunities for developing arts, crafts and trade. Doing business and trading the products over the boundaries, the people needed effective communication means in order to manage the businesses and administer the institutions. The folk wisdom has treasured – from popular prospective – this language of business in form of proverbs.

Today, any serious discussion on business – either theoretical or practical – cannot avoid the global context. The global economy of the 21st century most probably originates in smaller regional economies, historically dominated by varied empires. Romanian people enjoy the rich and diverse cultural heritage of several empires (Roman, Byzantine, etc). What else could an empire economically be other than a lower-scale “global economy”?

More and more research work is dedicated to international dimension of the business, stimulated by the growing success of the multi-national companies and business models developed and taught in world-known business schools. The original assumption that “global” means as well the “universal” applicability of the advanced (North-American) principles of business management has proved to be wrong (Adler, 1991): “far from ignoring the common body of knowledge, international dimensions expand our understanding of people's behaviour at work to include the diversity and complexity of today's global economic environment” [14].

The global economy is more and more the battlefield for spectacular or discrete strategic alliances, mergers and acquisitions. Unfortunately – but normally from statistic point of view – some of them fail. The blame for failures of international alliances is on cultural clash, on conflicting national and organisational cultures [15]. Looking at the half-full glass, we may say that successful alliances are based on cross-cultural mutual understanding, which traverses cultural boundaries.

The typical intercultural conflicts are described between foreign managers and local staff – originated not that much because of the intercultural business communication process or linguistic issues but mostly because of different cultural attitudes [16]. The five cultural dimensions³ identified and defined by Hofstede were subject for a more recent research in Balkan countries (Romania, Bulgaria). They demonstrate – surprisingly or mostly not – similarities as far as high PDI, low IDV, high UAI, and short term orientation (low LTO). The country cultural profiles are significantly similar to other Balkan countries [17, pg. 134].

³ PDI = Power Distance Index; IDV = Individualism Index; MAS = Masculinity Index; UAI = Uncertainty Avoidance Index; LTO = Long Term Orientation Index.

One of the explanations offered by Luca for the high values of PDI and UAI for the Balkan countries is ... the heritage of the Roman Empire!

It was demonstrated that the higher the PDI, the more likely teamwork metaphors will be used [8]. Metaphors are means of communication as their purpose is “to convey a series of messages through a process of association and images” ... “A strategic metaphor is a linguistic construction of carefully chosen words, which conveys the essence of the organisation’s strategic intent and its core values” per Cacciaguidi-Fahy and Cunningham [15, pg. 137] – which are essential messages to be communicated in multi-cultural working environments and global economic context. The proverbs are just another type of metaphors [19].

Many proverbs appear in several cultures – as sign of universality. This is why the simple presence of a certain proverb in a certain language does not necessarily mean that it originates in that culture [1]. Because the proverbs have a relatively large area of circulation – as demonstrated previously - deeper comparative studies are required in order to develop a sentence in this respect. This paper focuses mostly on the entrepreneurial and management meaning of the selected proverbs and considers the Romanian territory as their origin, according to the bibliographic sources quoted.

3. Entrepreneurship and management in Romanian proverbs

Regardless their geographic location, all proverbs deal with the following three major aspects: people’s ability to make right judgments (decisions), people’s exceptional sense of justice, and special sense of humour – which make them “universal spiritual values” [17]. Actually, the first two features are basic management values as well.

There are not only numerous proverbs but significant number of references. As example, in April 2007, Google search has offered for “Romanian proverbs” 166,000 items, in just 0.38 seconds! The author of this paper started a systematic investigation of the Romanian proverbs, looking at their profound meanings, from managerial and entrepreneurial prospective. A relevant set of suitable Romanian proverbs was filtered and selected – based on more recent proverbs collections [1, 21, 22]. Illustrative samples are presented below, according to the following topics: *business principles*, *management principles*, *decision-making process*, and *entrepreneurship*. More recent research work has focused on entrepreneurship mostly [23].

From popular perspectives, there are numerous proverbs emphasizing the people’s entrepreneurial features (as initiative and risk taking, remarkable spirit of innovation, creativity, opportunity and goal orientation, competition spirit, hard-working, flexibility), regardless the country of origin; hence, their “global”

characteristic. However, amid the commonality, different people have their own way to express history-long life experience.

1° Business principles

| Romanian original version | English approximate translation | Comments on business principles |
|---|---|---|
| 'Cine se teme de brumă nu pune viță de vie' | Who is afraid of hoarfrost shouldn't cultivate grapevines | Entering in business means assuming the risks as well |
| 'Cine nu riscă nu câștigă' | Who does not assume the risk does not win | |
| 'Nu trece gârla dacă nu-i vezi fundul' | Do not cross the river if you do not see its bottom | Business is not gambling. The businessman has to assume the risk; and the risk has to be correctly assessed. A talented businessperson does not assume unnecessary risks or risks generated by total lack of information (no information on the depth of the river waters). |
| 'Câștigul și paguba sunt frați de cruce' | Gain and loss are sworn brothers | Duality gain-loss (profit-loss): the loss is part of the business game as the gain (profit) is. |
| 'Nu e câștig fără pagubă' | There is no gain without loss | The gain and loss are associated to the business risk: higher risk business could lead to higher profits but higher loss too; and vice versa. |
| 'Frate-frate, dar brânza-i pe bani' | The cheese is for money, even for brothers | Business principles are very strict: the business should not mix with family or friendship. If they meet, then the business relationships have priority over the family relationships (business comes first). |
| 'Ban la ban trage' | Money goes to money | The basic rule of business: It is not possible to get profits with no expenses; in order to have profits, one has to spend first. |
| 'Paraua ⁴ para câștigă' | The coin earns other coin | |

⁴ 'Paraua' (coin) = is a word of *Turkish* origin meaning small silver coin ('paraua' was in use on Romanian territory).

2° Management principles

| Romanian original version | English approximate translation | Comments on management principles |
|---|---|---|
| ‘Aşa-i lumea, din bucăţi, vede unul face toţi’ | The world is made out of distinct parts: one sees and all others do | Hierarchy principle: Any organisation is hierarchically structured in managers and staff; the top manager is on the top of it. The organization (‘world’) is structured (‘made out of distinct parts’): the role of the top manager is to ‘see’ the right decisions; the execution people ‘do’ in order to implement the manager’s decisions. |
| ‘Turma fără câine o mănâncă lupul’ ‘Vai de târla fără câini şi de casa fără stăpâni’ | The flock which has no dog is eaten by the wolf The sheepfold with no dogs and house with no masters are to weep for | The essential role of the manager in organisation: Any organisation (flock, sheepfold, house) must have a manager (dog, master). Lack of professional managers leads to business failure (it is ‘eaten by the wolf’). |
| ‘Peştele de la cap se împute’ ‘Capul face, capul trage’ | The fish starts to rot at head The head does, the head is responsible for | The role of leaders: Performant managers are good examples for subordinates; the opposite is true as well: the poor managers (‘rotten fish head’) provoke the failure of entire organisation (‘fish’ body). Assuming the responsibility: The head of the organisation is responsible for the consequences of the decisions he has made previously. |
| ‘Când pisica nu-i acasă, şoarecii joacă pe masă’ | When the cat is not at home, the mice play on the table | Controlling function: The manager (‘cat’) has to permanently control its organisation (‘home’); otherwise, the adverse factors (‘the mice’) will provoke damages in key areas of the organisation (not only ‘at home’ but even ‘on the table’). |
| ‘Ochii înţeleptului văd mai departe’ | The eyes of the wise man see a lot farther | The foreseeing and planning function of management: The good manager (‘wise man’) has to be farseeing; he has the capacity (‘eyes’) to see farther than others. Consequently, he is able to develop the organisation strategy. |

3° *Decision-making process*

| Romanian original version | English approximate translation | Comments on decision-making process |
|--|---|---|
| 'Judecă și apoi vorbește' | Think and then talk | The decision cycle: Decision-making is a complex process: the decision cycle starts with gathering and processing the information; then developing decision options and selecting the right decision ('think'), <i>and only then</i> the decision is transmitted ('talk'). |
| 'Croitorul bun măsoară de trei ori și taie o dată' | The good tailor measures three times and cuts once | The good decisions ('cuts') have to be well prepared and documented (measured 'three times') by good managers ('good tailors'). |
| 'Țara arde și baba se piaptână' | The country is burning and the old woman is doing her hair | Setting the right priorities during the decision making process: First things first. |
| 'Lumea pierе și baba se piaptână' | The world is disappearing and the old woman is doing her hair | These proverbs make fun of poor managers ('old women') who set wrong priorities ('do the hair' while 'country is burning' / 'world is disappearing'). |
| 'A veni la spartul târgului' | To come when the fair is over | Decision opportunity: When decision is made too late ('when the fair is over'), the opportunity is gone and the decision is useless. |
| 'Bate fierul cât e cald' | Hammer the iron as long as it's heated | Or, one can get the expected result (the iron's desired shape) as long as the iron is heated only; when cooled, it's too late! |
| 'Ce poți face azi, nu lăsa pe mâine' | What could be done today is not for tomorrow | The management of the special resource <i>time</i> (time management): Time isn't reversible and cannot be stocked; it shouldn't be wasted. |
| 'Cine a pățit multe, știe multe' | The one who has more (bad) experiences knows more | Role of (practical) experience in management: more experience, better the manager. |
| 'Greșind învață omul' | The man learns by doing mistakes | The good manager ('man') learns from his own mistakes. However, the key is not to repeat the mistakes. The best managers learn from other people's experience / mistakes. |

4° Entrepreneurship

| Romanian original version | English approximate translation | Comments on entrepreneurship |
|---|--|---|
| ‘Nu averea face pe om, ci omul averea’ | The man makes its wealth, not vice versa | The entrepreneurial spirit and features are more important than money (the capital): The business success (‘wealth’) depends mostly on the entrepreneur’s potential (‘man’ – what wonderful is the entrepreneur nominated!). |
| ‘Norocu-i după cum și-l face omul’ | The good luck is made by the man himself | The entrepreneurial spirit and features are more important than chance: the business success (‘good luck’) depends mostly on the entrepreneur’s skills and not on hazard. |
| ‘Când sunt doi, puterea crește’ ‘Când doi se ceartă, al treilea câștigă’ | Two means more power When two argue, the third wins | The importance of teamwork and reliable partnership. The importance of coalitions – based on <i>win-win principle</i> . When partnership is not reliable, based on mutual trust, and partners disagree (they ‘argue’), then both partners will loose and the competition will win (‘the third wins’). |
| ‘Cârmaciul bun scapă din furtună’ | The good steersman escapes from the tempest | Entrepreneur vs. business environment: The best managers are the entrepreneurs (‘steersmen’) that prove their abilities under the threats of the environment (‘tempest’); then the reward is high. When environment is friendly, most managers and companies can make it – but the average reward is low. |

It was not the purpose of this paper to present all the possible examples to illustrate all the managerial principles or entrepreneurial features. The above examples were not selected randomly either. As part of a more comprehensive work in progress, they were just a sample used to emphasize the idea that modern entrepreneurship and management science have strong roots in proverbs.

The proverbs used in our demonstration were Romanian. Although, this does not mean that only Romanian proverbs enjoy this extraordinary property; many proverbs are common in several cultures.

It was not our ultimate goal to claim that Romanians are better businesspeople, entrepreneurs or managers than other nationals – this might be the objective of another research ...

4. Conclusions

This paper is the first attempt to publicly present some managerial aspects – as *business principles*, *management principles*, *decision-making process*, and *entrepreneurship* – reflected in proverbs' popular wisdom.

The empirical research started in Romania [23] and then it is aiming at becoming broader, towards the neighbouring Balkan countries.

It is significant to mention the oldness of these proverbs: many of them refer to a-temporal domestic habits or daily life, while others are related to ancient shepherd occupations – so popular in Romanian territories.

The last important aspect that should be emphasized: in spite of local and national peculiarities, there are numerous proverbs expressing similar life experience and conclusions, regardless the country of origin; hence, their “global” characteristic, surpassing the country borders.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- [1] *Gheorghe, G.* Proverbele românești și proverbele lumii romanice, Ed. Albatros, București, 1986.
- [2] *Golescu, I.* Pilde, povățuiri și cuvinte adevărate, adunate de dumnealui Dvornicul I.G. Biblioteca Academiei României, București, 1827-1845.
- [3] *Zanne, I.A.* Proverbele românilor din România, Basarabia, Bucovina, Ungaria, Istria și Macedonia, **Vol. I – X**, București, 1895 – 1903/1912 (1903 written / 1912 issued).
- [4] *Pann, A.* Culegere de proverburile sau povestea vorbii. De prin lume adunate și iarăși la lume date (in Romanian, with Slavonic letters), A. Pann's Printing House, București, 1847. Reprinted 1880, with Latin letters, Editura Tipografiei Dor P. Cucu, București.
- [5] *Densușianu, N.* “Proverbele române ca material pentru instituțiunile dreptului roman în Dacia. Studiu juridico-paremiologic”, Brașov, **Year 1**, no. 42, 1874, p. 168.
- [6] *Vasile, V.* Iubirea de moșie e un zid, Ed. Albatros, București, 1977.
- [7] *Duduleanu, M.M.* Proverbele lumii despre calități și defecte, Ed. Albatros, București, 1978.
- [8] *Mihăilescu, E.* Proverbe, cugetări, definiții despre educație, Ed. Albatros, București, 1978.
- [9] *Von Düringsfeld, I.* Das Sprichwort als Kosmopolit, Verlag Hermann Fries, Leipzig, 1863.
- [10] *Mawer, E.B.* Analogous proverbs in ten languages, Paternoster, Row, E.C., London, 1885.
- [11] *Leist, L.* Proverbe și expresiuni proverbiale române, germane și franceze, Ed. H. Steinberg, București, 1900.
- [12] *Ikonomov, N.I.* Balkanska narodna midrosti, Sofia, Bulgaria, 1968.
- [13] *Ghițescu, M.* Dicționar de proverbe spaniol-portughez-român, Ed. Științifică și Enciclopedică, București, 1980.
- [14] *Adler, N.* International Dimensions of Organizational Behaviour. Second Edition, PWS-Kent Publishing Company, Boston, 1991.

- [15] *Cacciaguidi-Fahy, S., and Cunningham, J.* "The Use of Strategic Metaphors in Intercultural Business Communication", in *Managing Global Transitions International Research Journal*, **Vol. 5**, no. 2, Summer 2007, pp.133-155.
- [16] *Hofstede, G.* *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviours, institutions and organizations across nations*, Sage, London, 2001.
- [17] *Luca, A.* *Employeeescu*, Ed. România Pur și Simplu, București, 2005.
- [18] *Gibson, C.B.* "Metaphors and meaning: An intercultural analysis of the concept of teamwork", in *Administrative Quarterly Science*, **Vol. 46**, no. 2, 2001, pp. 274-306.
- [19] *Ruxăndoiu, P.* "Aspectul metaforic al proverbelor", in *Studii de poetică și stilistică*, Biblioteca Academiei Române, București, 1966, pp. 94-113.
- [20] *Rudică, T., Costea, D.* *Psihologia omului în proverbe*, Ed. Polirom, Iași, 2004.
- [21] *Botezatu, G., and Hâncu, A.* *Dicționar de proverbe și zicători românești*, Ed. Litera Internațional, București-Chișinău, 2001.
- [22] * * * *Proverbe, strigături, ghicitori*, Ed. Steaua Nordului, București, 2004.
- [23] *Scarlat, C.* *Antreprenoriat*, Ed. Academiei, București. Forthcoming.