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BUSINESS, MANAGEMENT, AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN ROMANIAN AND PORTUGUESE PROVERBS

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Abstract

Business and trade, along with the development of arts and crafts, have always offered wonderful opportunities for interaction between different people, customs, and cultures. Doing business and trading, people needed effective means of communication to manage their businesses and administer related institutions. Folk wisdom has treasured, from a popular prospective, this language of business—over all natural, cultural, and language obstacles—in its extremely concentrated but self-explanatory form: proverbs. Surprisingly, the relatively new principles of business management and entrepreneurship have quite interesting correspondents in peoples' oral culture as proverbs. Certain proverbs distil people's experiences from diverse business situations, management positions, and entrepreneurial standpoints, regardless of country of origin, hence their universal and global value.

As part of more extensive work on the above subject, as well as a base for comparative studies, this paper is the first research work to illustrate how elements of global management culture are reflected in proverbs. Hence, a number of proverbs are analyzed and their educative value emphasized as cases or examples in business, management, and entrepreneurship education. This paper tries to set off the almost unexplored and challenging potential of proverbs to be used as teaching aids, while working with both undergraduate students (mainly) and international students.

Moreover, this paper aims at analyzing the correspondence between Romanian and Portuguese proverbs (as two countries of similar cultural background—Latin), as far as the way they reflect the elements of business, management, and entrepreneurship. Illustrative examples are analyzed according to 21 different key-issues of business, management, and entrepreneurship (7 for each).

The major conclusions are these: (i) all 21 principles are covered by proverbs in both languages; (ii) there is an astonishingly high degree of correlation between Romanian and Portuguese proverbs: out of a sample of 30 Romanian proverbs on business, management and entrepreneurship issues, 28 have Portuguese counterparts.

A good part of this paper is based on previous research (Scarlat, 2008a, 2008b).

Keywords

business, management, entrepreneurship, Romanian and Portuguese proverbs, higher education, global and universal value of proverbs

Biographies

Cezar Scarlat: Professor of Management at University Politehnica of Bucharest, Romania, where he also received his PhD degree. He has a twofold background (engineering and economics) and has done post-graduate studies in Romania and abroad. Dr Scarlat has published several books and over 120 articles. He is a member of professional associations and active on several editorial boards: *International Journal of Management & Enterprise Development* and *Industrial Management & Data Systems*. He has been a visiting professor at a number of European universities.

Alexandra Albuquerque: has been teaching at the School of Accounting and Administration of the Polytechnic Institute of Porto for 9 years. She is a language and translation teacher and has been the head of the International Office since 2004. She graduated in Language and Literature in 1999 and holds a master's degree in German Studies. She is carrying out her PhD research in Computational Linguistics at the moment.

1. Introduction

The business and trade, along with the development of arts and crafts, have always offered wonderful opportunities for interaction between different people, customs, and cultures. Doing business and trading, people needed effective means of communication to manage their businesses and administer the related institutions. Folk wisdom has treasured, from a popular perspective, this language of business—over all natural, cultural, and language obstacles—in its extremely concentrated but self-explanatory form: proverbs. Surprisingly, the relatively new principles of business management and entrepreneurship have quite interesting correspondents in peoples' oral culture as proverbs. Certain proverbs distil people's experiences from diverse business situations, management positions, and entrepreneurial standpoints, regardless of their country of origin, hence their universal and global value.

2. Universal and global value of proverbs

Today, any serious discussion about business—either theoretical or practical—cannot avoid the global context. More and more research work is dedicated to the international dimension of the business, stimulated by the growing success of multi-national companies based on business models developed and taught in world-famous business schools. The original assumption that *global* also means the *universal* applicability of 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'.

The global economy is a competitive battlefield but also a theatre for spectacular or discrete strategic alliances, mergers and acquisitions. Unfortunately—but healthy for business and just normal from a statistical point of view—some of them fail. The blame for the failure of international alliances is on cultural clash and on conflicting national

and organisational cultures (Cacciaguidi-Fahy and Cunningham, 2007). On the other hand, successful alliances are based on cross-cultural mutual understanding, which overcomes cultural obstacles. The typical intercultural conflicts are described between foreign managers and local staff. The origin of conflicts is not so much on account of the intercultural business communication process or linguistic issues, but it arises mostly due to different cultural attitudes (Hofstede, 2001). The five cultural dimensions¹ identified and defined by Hofstede were subject to more recent research in Romania; they demonstrate—surprisingly or 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 as well (Luca, 2005; p. 134).

Gibson (2001) has demonstrated that the higher the PDI, the more likely teamwork metaphors will be used. Metaphors are means of communication since their purpose is 'to convey a series of messages through a process of association and images', and they convey 'the essence of the organisation's strategic intent and its core values' (Cacciaguidi-Fahy and Cunningham, 2007, pg. 137), which are essential messages to be communicated in multi-cultural working environments and the global economic context. Proverbs are just another type of metaphor (Ruxandoiu, 1966).

Many proverbs appear in several cultures—a 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 (Gheorghe, 1986). Because 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.

Regardless of 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,
- people's special sense of humour,

which make them 'universal spiritual values' (Rudica and Costea, 2004). Actually, the first two aspects are basic management values as well.

Therefore, this paper focuses mostly on the business management and entrepreneurship meaning of selected Romanian and Portuguese proverbs. Romania and Portugal were selected as countries with similar a cultural background—in terms of Latinity.

3. Romanian and Portuguese proverbs

Proverbs are considerably older than modern management science. A remarkable book demonstrates that there are proverbs in the Bible which have an older origin: Egyptian, Sumerian or Babylonian (Gheorghe, 1986, pp. 41–43).

The first considerable systematic collections of Romanian proverbs started early in the 19th century: Iordache Golescu (about 1827–1845) collected 18,366 proverbs in 854 handwritten pages. Anton Pann (1847) has also collected 1,144 proverbs and presented them categorized by topics in 25 groups; he enlarged the collection (to 3,015 proverbs) in 1852–1853. Pann's collection is important since he initiated one of the two important developments in the literature about proverbs: *organizing the proverbs by topics*.

Most of the Golescu's proverbs were taken by Iuliu A. Zanne and made accessible to the public in the 8th Volume (1900) of his monumental work in ten volumes (Zanne, 1895–1903/1912). This gigantic scientific work of 8,000 pages, produced a century ago, is larger than all collections of proverbs published in Italy, Spain and Portugal together over the past hundred years and unique in the world considering the quality of the printing (Gheorghe, 1986, p. 56).

The second important development—starting from collections of proverbs—is to produce *comparative studies*. In 1863, the Romanian poet George Cosbuc wrote the foreword to Ida von Düringsfeld's comparative study about proverbs from 83 languages and dialects—among them there were 19 Romanian proverbs (von Düringsfeld, 1863). There are more examples in this respect: analogous proverbs in Latin and nine modern European languages (Mawer, 1885).

The empirical research started in Romania (Scarlat, 2007, 2008b) and its aim is to become broader, encompassing other countries or regions such as the Balkans (Afendras and Scarlat, 2007) or the Arabian world (Scarlat and Afendras, 2008).

This paper specifically aims at analyzing the correspondence between basic principles of business management and entrepreneurship on the one hand and the meaning of a sample of Romanian and Portuguese proverbs on the other.

4. Learning business, management, and entrepreneurship by proverbs

The idea to use proverbs as examples or small cases appeared extremely useful when teaching management to undergraduate students, who have no management experience and even no practical experience at all. At the graduate level, the students have not only practical experience but also significant management practice (mainly executive MBA students). In their classes, cases are currently used successfully as teaching aids (Scarlat, 2007, 2008a).

There is a large spectrum of ways to use proverbs as teaching aids in management and entrepreneurship classes²: as simple examples to strengthen or underline a new situation or abstract definition, as subject and icebreaker for debates and group discussions, as homework to write essays, as a research subject, or even as a relaxing moment when students seem to be less connected.

Amid the commonality, different people have their own way of expressing life experiences. In spite of similar life experience and conclusions, there are numerous proverbs expressing local and national peculiarities. This is why proverbs can be successfully used as a teaching aid when working with international undergraduate students. The proverbs offer a valid pretext for cross-cultural communication, culture and knowledge exchange, and teamwork.

Illustrative samples of Romanian and Portuguese proverbs are presented below, according to 21 different key issues of business, management, and entrepreneurship (7 for each). It is significant to notice that:

- i. All 21 principles are covered by proverbs in both languages.
- ii. There is an astonishing *high degree of correlation between Romanian and Portuguese proverbs*: out of a sample of 30 Romanian proverbs on business,

management and entrepreneurship issues (11, 11 and 8 respectively), 28 have Portuguese correspondents (10, 10, and 8 respectively).

4.1. Business

<i>Romanian original version</i> & its approximate English translation	<i>Portuguese original version</i> & its approximate English translation	Comments on business principles
<i>Când sunt doi, puterea crește</i> Two means more power	<i>Duas cabeças pensam melhor do que uma</i> Two heads think better than one	<i>Business partnership</i> The importance of reliable partnership. Partnership ('two' or 'two heads') means more business potential ('more power' or 'think better'). When a partnership is not reliable and based on mutual trust and the partners disagree (they 'argue'), then both partners will lose and the competition wins ('the third party wins'). The importance of coalitions—based on the <i>win-win principle</i> . These proverbs apply to <i>teamwork</i> and team members as well.
"Când doi se ceartă, al treilea câștigă" When two argue, the third party wins	"Fraco é todo o poder, se a união falece" United we stand, divided we will fall	
<i>Nu poți mânca miezul dacă nu spargi nuca</i> Crack the walnut to eat its kernel	<i>Quem quer bolota, trepa</i> Whoever wants to eat an acorn must climb the tree No pain, no gain	<i>Business means effort</i> To enjoy the results of the business ('eat the kernel'), one has to make some effort and work on it first ('crack the walnut'). The opposite it is not necessarily true.
<i>Ban la ban trage</i> Money follows money "Paraua para câștigă" A coin earns another coin	<i>Dinheiro chama dinheiro</i> Money makes money	<i>Business needs (financial) resources</i> A basic rule of business is that it is not possible to get profits with no expenses; in order to have profits, one has to spend first. The higher the expenditure, the higher the expected profit (although not proportionally) and vice versa (although not reversibly).

<p><i>Câştigul și paguba sunt frați de cruce</i> Gain and loss are sworn brothers</p>	<p><i>Ganhar e perder são faces da mesma moeda</i> Gain and loss are two faces of the same coin</p>	<p><i>Duality of gain-loss (profit-loss)</i> The loss is part of the game of business just as gain (profit) is ('are sworn brothers'). Both gain and loss are associated with business risk. More than that, business risk and probability of gaining are complementary: Business risk = = 1 – Probability (gain) A higher-risk business could lead to higher profit but higher loss too, and vice versa. When the risk is low, the profits are smaller as the same profits share to more.</p>
<p><i>Nu e câştig fără pagubă</i> There is no gain without loss</p>	<p><i>Perder e ganhar, tudo é jogar</i> To play is losing and winning</p>	
<p><i>Cine se teme de brumă nu pune viță de vie</i> Whoever is afraid of hoarfrost should not cultivate grapevines</p>	<p><i>Quem pássaros receia, milho não semeia</i> Whoever is afraid of birds should not cultivate corn</p>	<p><i>Assuming business risk</i> Entering business ('cultivate grapevines'), hoping and planning an income (the grapes, wine, and so on) means assuming the associated risks as well (like 'hoarfrost'), which do not depend on the decision-maker since they are external factors (here, the weather). The second proverb is more explicit and definitely clear.</p>
<p><i>Cine nu riscă nu câştigă</i> Whoever is not willing to assume risk will not win (No pain, no gain)</p>	<p><i>Quem não arrisca, não petisca</i> Whoever is not willing to assume risk will not win</p>	
<p><i>Nu trece gârla dacă nu-i vezi fundul</i> Do not cross the river if you do not see its bottom</p>	<p><i>O seguro morreu de velho</i> Mr. Safe died old Prevention is better than cure</p>	<p><i>Assessing risk</i> The businessman has to assume risk but ... assess the risk! Business is not gambling. Risk has to be correctly assessed in order to better appreciate its consequences and plan the necessary resources accordingly (even to think of backup measures). A talented businessperson does not assume unnecessary risks or risks generated by total lack of information (no information on the depth of the river) in her/his business. S/he will gather the information related to this issue and then will plan the business (how/when/where to cross the</p>

		river) and implement it (finally cross the river) successfully.
<i>Frate-frate, dar brânza-i pe bani</i> The cheese costs money, even for brothers	<i>Amigos, amigos, negócios à parte</i> Gentlemen, business is business	<i>Business vs. family or friendship</i> Business principles are very strict: business should not be mixed with family or friendship. When they meet, then the business relationships have priority over the friendship or family relationships (business comes first: 'cheese costs money, even for brothers').

4.2. Management

<i>Romanian original version</i> & its approximate English translation	<i>Portuguese original version</i> & its approximate English translation	Comments on management
<i>Așa-i lumea, din bucăți, vede unul face toți</i> The world is made of distinct parts: one sees and all others do	<i>Manda quem pode, obedece quem deve</i> Some rule, others obey	<i>Principle of hierarchy</i> Any organisation is hierarchically structured, comprising managers (at different levels) and staff. The top manager is on the top of the organisation and above the other managers (on lower hierarchical levels). The organization ('world') is structured ('made of distinct parts'): the role of the top manager (the 'one') is to supervise ('see') and make the right decisions. The other people just 'do' in order to implement the manager's decisions.
<i>Turma fără câine o mănâncă lupul</i> The flock which has no dog is eaten by the wolf <i>Vai de târta fără câini și de casa fără stăpâni</i> The sheepfold with no dogs and house with no masters are to weep for	<i>Uma cabeça perdida deita muitas a perder</i> A lost head loses many heads	<i>The supervising role of the manager</i> Any organisation ('flock', 'sheepfold', 'house') must have a manager ('dog', 'master'). Lack of professional managers leads to business failure under the pressure of external factors (it is 'eaten by the wolf').
<i>Când pisica nu-i acasă,</i>	<i>Quando em casa não</i>	<i>Controlling function</i>

<p><i>șoarecii joacă pe masă</i> When the cat is not at home, the mice play on the table <i>This proverb has an equivalent in French:</i> <i>Quand le chat n'est pas au logis, Dansent les souris.</i></p>	<p><i>está o gato, folga o rato</i> When the cat is not at home, the mice play on the table <i>Patrão for a, dia santo na loja</i> When the cat is away, the mouse will play</p>	<p>The manager ('cat') has to permanently control the organisation ('home'); otherwise, adverse factors ('the mice') will cause damage in key areas of the organisation (not only 'at home' but even 'on the table').</p>
<p><i>Croitorul bun măsoară de trei ori și taie o dată</i> The good tailor measures three times and cuts once <i>Judecă și apoi vorbește</i> Think and then talk</p>	<p><i>Escuta cem vezes, fala uma só</i> Listen a hundred times and speak once <i>Pensa duas vezes, antes de falar</i> Think twice before speaking</p>	<p><i>Documenting decisions</i> Good decisions ('cuts') have to be well prepared and documented (measured 'three times') by good managers ('good tailors'). Decision-making is a complex process: the decision cycle starts with gathering and processing the information; then developing options for decisions and selecting the right decision ('think'), <i>and only then</i> the decision is transmitted ('talk').</p>
<p><i>Înghite cât poți mesteca</i> Bite off as much as you can chew <i>Întinde-te cât ți-e plapuma</i> Stretch as much as your cover allows</p>	<p><i>Não tenhas mais olhos do que barriga</i> Do not take more than you can chew <i>Não dês um passo maior do que a perna</i> Walk as fast as your legs allow</p>	<p><i>Setting the right objectives</i> Objectives should be set in a SMART manner (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-related). The objectives ('bites') have to be correlated with management and operational capacity ('as much as you can chew') and available resources ('as much as your cover allows').</p>
<p><i>A veni la spartul târgului</i> To come when the fair is over <i>"Bate fierul cât e cald"</i> Strike while the iron is hot</p>	<p><i>Malha o ferro enquanto está quente</i> Strike while the iron is hot</p>	<p><i>Making decisions in a timely manner</i> When a decision is made too late ('when the fair is over'), the opportunity is gone and the decision ('to come to the fair') is useless. Or, one can get the expected result (the desired shape of the iron) as long as the iron is hot; when cooled, it's too late to hammer it!</p>

<i>Capul face, capul trage</i> The head does, the head is responsible	<i>Na cama que fizeres, nela te deitarás</i> As you make your bed, so you must lie in it	<i>Assuming responsibility</i> The head of the organisation is responsible for the consequences of the decisions s/he is making ('does').
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4.3. Entrepreneurship

<i>Romanian original version</i> & its approximate English translation	<i>Portuguese original version</i> & its approximate English translation	Comments on entrepreneurship
<i>Nu tot ce zboară se mănâncă</i> Not everything that flies is eatable	<i>Nem tudo o que reluz é ouro</i> Not everything that glitters is gold	<i>Assessing business ideas</i> The skilled entrepreneur has the talent to assess business ideas correctly the ('everything that flies'): only a few of them are good, workable and profitable (are 'eatable'), while others are not.
<i>Norocu-i după cum și-l face omul</i> Good luck is made by the man himself	<i>A sorte somos nós que a fazemos</i> Good luck is made by the man himself <i>Cada qual é artífice da sua sorte</i> Good luck is made by the man himself	<i>The entrepreneur and opportunity</i> Entrepreneurial spirit and skills are more important than chance. Business success ('good luck') depends mostly on the entrepreneur's potential (man—wonderful synthetic word for entrepreneur!) to see and use opportunities. The entrepreneur is neither dependent on nor waiting for hazard.
<i>Nu averea face pe om, ci omul averea</i> The man makes wealth, not vice versa	<i>Ao homem de esforço, a fortuna lhe põe ombro</i> The man who strives will find wealth	<i>The entrepreneur and resources</i> Entrepreneurial spirit and skills are more important than money (capital). Business success ('wealth') depends mostly on the entrepreneur's potential ('man', again!).

<p><i>Peștele de la cap se mpute</i> Fish starts to rot at the head</p> <p><i>Copacul putrezește de la rădăcină</i> The tree starts to rot at the roots</p>	<p><i>Aonde falta o poder, ninguém pode responder</i> Where there is no power, there is no responsibility</p>	<p><i>Leadership</i> The role of leaders: successful entrepreneurs are good examples to follow. The opposite is true as well: poor managers (rotten 'fish head' or 'tree roots') provoke the failure of the entire organisation ('fish' body or 'tree').</p>
<p><i>Leneșul mai mult aleargă și scumpul mai mult păgubește</i> The lazy man runs more and the tight-fisted man pays more</p>	<p><i>Quem não arrisca, não petisca</i> Nothing ventured, nothing gained</p>	<p><i>Active attitude</i> Avoiding risk and excess prudence lead to passivity ('lazy' and 'tight-fisted' attitude), which is very costly in business ('man runs more' and 'pays more' eventually). Entrepreneurial spirit is to accept the risk, assess the risk, and have an active attitude: <i>act!</i></p>
<p><i>Cine caută găsește</i> The man who is seeking, finds</p>	<p><i>Quem procura, sempre encontra</i> The man who seeks, finds</p>	<p><i>Perseverance</i> Perseverance, determination and diligence are strengths of successful entrepreneurs; they believe in their vision and persistently follow their way towards the goals set (they are 'seeking' the goals). Finally, they achieve ('find') their goals. <i>Perseverance is not stubbornness.</i></p>
<p><i>Trestia care se pleacă în bătaia vântului nu se frânge</i> The flexible cane is not broken when the wind blows</p>	<p><i>Dança conforme a música</i> Dance to the music</p>	<p><i>Flexibility</i> Flexibility does not mean lack of verticality or character. To be flexible 'when the wind blows' is to understand the unfriendly environment, adapt, and resist. When the environment is friendly again, the entrepreneur comes back and his business ('cane') is vertical again by itself, with no effort.</p>

It is not the purpose of this paper to present all the possible examples to illustrate all the aspects of business, management, or entrepreneurship. The above examples were not selected randomly either. As part of a more comprehensive work in progress

(Scarlat, forthcoming), they were just a sample used to emphasize and document the idea that modern management science has strong roots in proverbs.

5. Conclusions

This paper is one in a series of first attempts to publicly present managerial aspects—as *principles of business, management, and entrepreneurship*—reflected in the popular wisdom of Romanian and Portuguese proverbs. The empirical research started in Romania and its aim is to become broader and encompass other countries—such as Portugal.

Proverbs are one of the most significant means to synthesize, concentrate, distil and treasure this generations-long practical experience. Long before management science was born, ancient businesspeople were successful based on ‘only’ their common sense, experience, and best practice continually transmitted along the generations.

Based on a sample of Romanian and Portuguese proverbs, a set of 21 different key-issues of business, management, and entrepreneurship (7 for each) were analyzed. The major conclusions are these:

- (i) All the 21 principles are covered by proverbs in both languages;
- (ii) There is an astonishing *high degree of correlation between Romanian and Portuguese proverbs*: out of a sample of 30 Romanian proverbs on business, management and entrepreneurship issues (11, 11 and 8 respectively), 28 have Portuguese correspondents (10, 10, and 8 respectively).

The proverbs have an unexplored and challenging potential to be used as teaching aids, while working with undergraduate students mainly but with international students as well.

The proverbs used in our demonstration were considered as Romanian and Portuguese, or considering the respective territories as their origin. From popular perspectives, they emphasize the people’s managerial talents in business and entrepreneurship. Although, this does not mean that only Romanian or Portuguese proverbs enjoy this extraordinary property. Many proverbs are common in cultures of several peoples, regardless the country of origin, surpassing the country borders; hence, their *universal value* and potential to be used *globally as metaphors* in cross-cultural working environment.

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

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¹ PDI = Power Distance Index, IDV = Individualism Index, MAS = Masculinity Index, UAI = Uncertainty Avoidance Index, LTO = Long Term Orientation Index.

² The author is using proverbs while teaching business strategy, project management, and entrepreneurship and management of small and medium-sized enterprises to undergraduate engineering students at University Politehnica of Bucharest, Romania.

