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It Is Only 24 Hours a Day—Neutralizations Are Necessary. Temporal Dilemmas of Managers

Abstract: Holding a chief position in an organized hierarchy means accepting a wide range of duties. What it leads to is a prolongation and adaptation of the working time as well as its pragmatization as far as the time (e.g. private time, leisure time) not directly connected to the individual's job is concerned. The need to subordinate, for not to call it incorporate all the other spheres of life into the business actions leads to “temporal tensions” emerging between discrepancies previously autonomous. The author of this paper reconstructed these tensions by showing different strategies and peculiar neutralizations which are used by managers in order to diminish or solve the tensions.

The methodology of grounded theory has been applied to analyse the collected material (narrative interviews). The outcomes of the research result from very detailed and arduous analyses of 35 managers' life-stories according to symbolic interactionism paradigm.

Keywords: neutralizations; temporality; narrations; career.

Introduction

As it is commonly acknowledged, two American sociologists, Gresham Sykes and David Matza (1957) are the authors of the neutralization theory. They created their own original concept by getting inspired and at the same time criticizing their contemporary theories of deviant behaviours (mainly the theories of social control and the cultural theory). Having done a research on a social background of juvenile delinquents, they reconstructed five neutralization techniques which were giving people that were committing a criminal offence the ability to act according to what their conscience was telling them. In other words, it was the ability to break the socially binding norm and simultaneously avoid a complete rejection or negation of it for the purpose of its temporal “suspension.” Denial of responsibility, denial of injury, denial of victim, condemnation of condemners and appeal to higher loyalties are techniques so general and common that the rationalization described by Sykes and Matza gained a quality of a substantial theory. Some time later other commonly used techniques were added to the theory (see Klockars 1974; Minor 1981; Coleman 1987, 2002; Lyman 2000; Nelson, Lambert 2001), among them emotional frustration, denial of negative intent, claim to normality of the behaviour, called also the metaphor of the

ledger¹ and a similar rationalization which can be described as a claim of the relative acceptability of the behaviour, appropriation and inversion, evidentiary solipsism and defense of necessity.

It is obvious that the neutralizations are not only used by members of criminal groups. They are always predominant in situations in which there appears an unendurable for an individual discord between an official, conformist system of values accompanied by a normative system and an “inherent,” unofficial, usually deviational system of values used in reality. The only difference lies in the fact that the criminal groups regularly break the official code of behaviour and, as a result, apply neutralization techniques. Moreover, the techniques are usually easier to observe (e.g. during questionings, trials). However, these rationalizations are also well substantiated also among groups that have nothing in common with those examined by Sykes and Matz. For instance, William C. Brennan (1974) described neutralization practices used by women who were having abortion and by medical staff performing the operation. The pregnant women, especially those that were poor or for different reasons marginalized by the society, were using different limitations and the unfulfilled need of medical and social help as a justification for their decision (according to Sykes and Matz’s theory—denial of responsibility). The women were also mentioning the costs of giving birth to an unwanted child (appeal to higher loyalties). The medical staff, on the other hand, represented by doctors and nurses, was applying depersonalization, or in the other words negation of humanity of the foetus (denial of injury) to rationalize their consent to the abortion. To stress their view on this matter they were using such techniques of abortion (e.g. vacuum) that were resulting in “a pile of used and dirty wads” (denial of injury). Dominika Byczkowska (2006) studied a closed community of young doctors and thus reconstructed the technique of denial of responsibility. The explanation for their taking bribes usually referred to a belief that a legally binding system of managing and financing the medical care was “ill” and thus forced them to behave unethically. Bribery could find its roots also in an appeal to higher loyalties such as to a necessity to provide for a family.

A well known research of James W. Coleman (1987, 2002) should be mentioned when dealing with the already-mentioned group of managers. The sociologist described a number of neutralizations which the members of the “white collars” class applied when committing unethical offenses. Therefore, he concluded that such techniques as a denial of the necessity of the law, claim of entitlement and a recognition of a rule “everybody else is doing it” were among rationalizations most often exercised.

The popularity of the first neutralization can be explained in a following way. The primary criterion for judging the manager and his/her main aims is his/her effectiveness usually visible in generated profits. When working under pressure and constantly struggling with competition, the entrepreneurs succumb to the temptation of “taking a short cut” on their way to success. Thus, the managers often have to decide whether to follow procedures and all the norms and formal agreements or to

¹ The technique of the ledger is best described, “I did much more good things than bad things. The few shameful actions cannot outweigh my merits. I have credit to use.”

break the law that limits them in the name of living up to the expectations that they have accepted along with their position. The pressure that the individual has to deal with appears conducive to applying the technique of the denial of the necessity of the law. Seeing the conviction that “everybody else is doing so” added to it proves how homogenous the group of managers is. The members of the described group usually come from the same social class, receive similar education, adhere to comparable standards of consumption, etc. But what is of utmost importance is that they work in similar environments in which competition and success are among the most important values. Thus, if our actor sees among his/her group behaviours contradictory to the abiding law or customs, s/he is prone to act in a similar way. Especially that in all probability s/he can expect recognition in reward for scores achieved in this fashion. A claim to recognize special rights (to cross the boundaries) emerges understandable when taking into consideration the high social status that the managers have the benefit of using. This status mainly results from a superior financial situation of the entrepreneurs, their prestige, as well as high competence and personal features essential in order to fulfill their duties effectively. The principle *noblesse oblige* is then even easier to be replaced with *noblesse privilege*.

(Tempo)rality and Neutralizations

The industrial epoch deprived time of its transcendental character. Along with other commodities, time starts to be subject to all-embracing law of demand and supply and thus now it has its price. It can be then bought and sold in a form of credit which is nowadays one of the driving forces behind modern capitalistic economy. Therefore, time is money and its effective exploitation has become a peculiar kind of *modus operandi* of the past and present postindustrial capitalism. It is a need to confront to the rule according to which one has to make the most of the given time; however, simultaneously it is conducive to various temporal tensions. The actor experiences a permanent conflict: on the one hand s/he plays a role of a manager who devotes much of his/her time to his/her job; on the other hand, s/he is a member of his/her family or a partner holding responsibility for his/her closest. At one point it emerges that the actor is not able to take part in both worlds to the same degree. After having decided on making sacrifices for his/her professional activities, s/he needs to neutralize a distress that comes from the feeling of not investing enough time in other, similarly important elements of life.

Data and Method of Analysis

The following part of the article will present neutralizations revealed by managers who were experiencing a temporal conflict between the roles that they were playing. The analysis was based on 25 interviews carried by the author of the research and his co-workers in 2001–2005 under the pretext of a broadly outlined temporal problem of

managerial careers (Dymarczyk 2005, 2008) and on 10 interviews carried out in 2006–2008 for the project under the working title “the temporal and spatial dimension of the world of managers.” (Transcripts of interviews have over 1,500 pages). The narrators represented various levels of managerial hierarchy (mainly medium and top management) both of medium and big profit companies. Most of the narrators lived and worked in Warsaw or Lodz or in the vicinity of these cities.

Research on temporal aspects of work and life of Polish managers are primarily exploratory in nature. Therefore, the qualitative techniques and methods are most wanted. In this case—narrative interview and methodology of grounded theory were employed. It seems that engaging an actor in spontaneous story telling about his/her life, creates the best chance to reach the deeply hidden mechanisms responsible for creating and maintaining temporal order and specific attitude toward time.

The basic way of biographical material testing procedures shall be developed by Anselm L. Strauss and Barney G. Glaser and followers, known as grounded theory methodology (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Glaser 1978; Strauss and Corbin 1990, 1997; see also: Konecki 2000; Gorzko 2008). According to them the procedure for data collection and data analysis, allows the preservation of the context of discovery (serendipity), which is one of the main advantages of the type of exploratory research.

With a flexible approach to the research problem, the subsequent stages of the study and the collected material, the investigator has the opportunity to explore phenomena that previously were not noticed or not at all tied to their respective significance.

Temporal Tension and its Neutralizations

Achieving (often desired) a managerial position is one of the most important points of “a temporal career.” Very often time spent by actors at work became longer than before in spite of that she or he can more freely plan their activities. However the main criterion for planning becomes now the organizational pragmatism (it means that good and valuable is not what is good but something that generates high level efficiency). Narrators often pointed out that breaking daily routine for *ad hoc* activities is an objective necessity:

—Typical work day? It is different. (...) The days differ. There is no typical because clients differ, all meetings and their length differ.

—I am result oriented. There is no rigid day plan. Must be done, that’s all. Doesn’t matter whether I work seven or twelve hours.

—My firm is “pure” capitalism. It doesn’t matter if I’m at work eight hours or more (...) I can’t be indifferent.

This pragmatic approach toward work time is expanded on pragmatism of time *en block*. For example: for a long time during my research I have been convinced that

sporting and relaxing activities belong to a category “private time.”² But one day (during my research) it has appeared that relaxation is closely connected with work as an antidote to work stress and non-hygienic life style.

—I don’t leave my office before late in the evening: some schedules, mails, many things. (...) Sometimes, like today, I go for volley-ball at eight o’clock. It is from time to time necessary for good condition. It must be.

—The most problematic is stress at work (...), reduction could be possible by some exercise. Some squash, gym, something like that.

—So once a week I go to a massage, a two-hour, which relaxes me incredibly! Unbelievable! It is very soothing for me. Once a week a two-hour massage gives me terribly much energy. In addition, relaxes the muscles. I have no muscle tone, however, and I’m sitting at a desk a lot.

So the “relaxing time” seems to be much closer to “work-time” than “private time” but intersection of this kinds of time doesn’t generate temporal conflicts. However if we take into consideration relations between business world and the actors’ family life situation differs. The arena of conflict is not contents of acts in this worlds but length of the time spend in both of them. Narrators unwillingly spoke about these problematic situations, but the “temporal tention” reveals in spontaneously expressed neutralizations.

A list of reconstructed neutralizations is as follows:

Neutralization 1. Time does not equal time, meaning “quality” of time is to compensate for the quantity of it:

—What allows me to be such a companion for my daughters is, for example, my temperament and the way I spend my free time. Because they can always go with me swimming, play volleyball, badminton, ride a horse, play tennis, roller-skate, ride a bike, right? ... What is more, well, I think that the quality decided about the contact. ... Of course we have them but I see the same problems, or with similar intensity, in families in which husbands come back home at four o’clock sharp. And this, I say, a certain quality of time and, and that counts.

—I also don’t think that a woman who devotes her time only to children, not working or working only few hours a day is a better mother or has a better contact with her kids. In such situations it happens that the woman doesn’t work, sits in front of a TV and watches some TV series but doesn’t talk to her children at all.

This neutralization seems to exemplify the rationalization described by Sykes and Matza as “denial of injury.” According to the narrators nothing wrong happens. The wasted time can be “made up for” thanks to intensity and a special quality of contact with the closest.

Neutralization 2. Nature and/or tradition decides, meaning referring to the (traditionally comprehended) male and female roles that complement each other:

² In this article the author overlooked such important and connected with time aspects like *sacrum* and *profanum* relations, influence of modern and post-modern reality, gender differences and other. These issues are discussed in his book: *Temporal Aspects of Managerial Career* (2008).

—My wife did all the home duties. She was bringing up our son. I was working. Till now I laugh at, well it's so sad, that I don't remember about some birthdays, wedding anniversaries, something..., but I remember a phone number to a contracting party in Germany. ... Well, but that's how it has to be in life.

—Nevertheless, all home duties, bringing up our son, planning expenses and so on are among my responsibilities. My husband supports me and he also has his tasks.

In this case it is hard to find a direct connection with the already-mentioned neutralizations. Such rationalizations as: “claim of normality of behaviours” and the rule: “everybody else is doing it” are most probable.

Neutralization 3. Everyone is going to be fine, meaning believing in particular independence and maturity of members (children) of one's family as a way to give explanation for a limited time contribution to family life:

—(a spontaneous and highly emotional reaction to the question “*How many children do you have?*”) No, my children are already grown-ups, I've got no problems with them, anyway I've never had! They are very placid, they haven't got problems at school. What is more, they had to learn how to cook really fast. My son was 7 when he started preparing pork chop because he liked that.

Denial of injury seems to be the most appropriate neutralization. Nothing stands on the way for the person to do his/her job. Everyone is grown-up and fulfills his/her needs regardless of the others' lives.

Neutralization 4. I am better, meaning diminishing importance of a spouse. Describing him/her as a person who does not bring anything as far as providing for the family is concerned, *ergo* the need to be a material guarantee for the family.

—I married a man not very well organizes and not very well, well org..., organizes and not resourceful. I don't know, that's what I chose ... Well, simply there have been situation that I simply wanted to quit my job and I don't know, just escape somewhere. It doesn't matter where. It was really hard because my husband so not resourceful. He has his small private business. But it's // He just earns some pennies. It's me who is this pillar.

—Yes, my wife doesn't have to work. It's enough I work. Thanks to this she can be with our daughter all the time. However, she prepares for me..., because she prepares it for me. ... He prepares different things for me.

Claim of entitlement emerges to describe the above-mentioned statements. Deprivation of partners does not have to result from the narrators' bad will. Well, “a breadwinner has to have his/her rights.”

Neutralization 5. Everyone does his/her own job, meaning justifying the lack of temporal tensions with the fact that both partners are similarly involved in their work:

—Umm, as far as family matters are concerned, here I've go no idea whether // ... Oh, you see. Well, if you think about it now, umm... Perhaps it (the conflict) does not appear that often because my wife had this nice job (also a manager), so she moved to this Warsaw and there was no problem at all ... She works a lot as well.

In case of this neutralization we can follow different paths. On the one hand, it is “denial of injury,” on the other, “denial of responsibility.” It can be also interpreted

as a very original argumentation born out of cultural changes in understanding of the partners' roles in the family.

Neutralization 6. A “borrowed” exteriorization of responsibility, meaning reducing temporal tensions with the help of people from the outside:

—We have this lady, a girl, that takes our child from a kindergarten. Let's say about 3 p.m. and then sits with him till 5 when my wife comes back from work. Because my wife works there. So this girl sits with my child for two hours. Then my wife comes back from work and everything is just fine. ... When it's holidays, just as it is now, our child is at his grandma's so there is no problem here either.

According to the narrators, having enough money and a social position allows people to solve problems that result from the lack of time which could and should be used with the closest. This rationalization, in all probability commonly applied, was not described until now. However, we can indirectly refer it to techniques of “denial of injury” and “denial of responsibility.” Everything appears to be all right, surrogate carers are competent and eventual problems are minor.

Neutralization 7. Technology helps, meaning the ability to control important family and personal matters from the distance:

—It's a way to ... be able to talk to one another, yes, this is it ... We send one another short messages, emails, talk only about facts, sometimes about our opinions, rarely about emotions.

—We spend a lot of money on telephones. We send one another messages because we communicate every single day, at least for a second. ... This is what keeps us together.

Thanks to the era of internet and mobile phones, contact via these appliances has become a normal thing. Undoubtedly it helps to keep bond between the closest strong but it can often become an easy “artificial connection” that imitates real contact between people. Similarly to the previously-mentioned neutralization, there are reasons to refer this rationalization to “denial of injury” technique.

Neutralization 8. Appeal to higher loyalties, meaning it is crucial to provide for the closest (children).

—My personal life starts at, let's say, 8 p.m., when I can devote all my free time to my daughter. I haven't got much of that time for her and during the season I see her only in the mornings when she's preparing for school ... It's all a matter of getting used to things. It is weren't for some sacrifice of mine, I wouldn't be able to give her all that she has today and later in her future.

A similar neutralization appears in two narrations, most probably not by accident. These were the stories of two individuals that were managing relatively small companies liable to any economic changes. At the same time, these were people whose position resulted not from their exceptional abilities or qualifications but from their intensive devotion for work. Thus, their intention to give their children all they can is not surprising. They wanted to spare the children sacrifices and tensions that their parents were going through.

Characteristic is that few narrators spontaneously and emotionally stressed that “there is now any conflict between business world and family life, for example. But it could be untrue. Very often these parts of narrations were too spontaneous and too emotionally. They, probably, tried to show the “line” which helps to show the face of self-made and self-control person (Goffman 1972: 5).

Summary

The list of presented neutralizations is fairly long. It is understandable that managers controlling their companies which repeatedly play on the market are liable to constant stress and (very often) temporal tensions. The necessity to find balance between two distinct roles, when each could be well applied for the whole day, seems conducive to activating different kinds of defensive strategies; neutralizations.

Most of the illustrated rationalizations can be exemplary of the techniques described by Sykes and Matza as well as their followers. Some, for instance neutralization 5 and 7, emerge to be (partly) original. They both are a result of social and technological changes which are characteristic of late capitalism and, as some say, post-modernity. Neutralizations are then a way to handle current and always altering challenges that an individual has to face when confronted with his/her everyday life.

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