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LEARNING ABOUT MANAGEMENT FROM PRACTITIONERS - DISCOURSES, DILEMMAS AND CONTRADICTIONS STEMMING FROM ANALYSIS OF SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED BY STUDENTS

[K. Pavlica](#)

[I. Matoušková](#)

ŠKODA AUTO University (CZECH REPUBLIC)

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**Abstract:**

The paper presents results of 83 semi-structured interviews conducted by Skoda Auto University students with managers during the years 2021 - 2022. Majority of respondents (65%) worked in automotive companies. The rest of them were employed in business, financial and industrial organizations. Discourse analysis of the results of these interviews aimed to provide university students with deeper understanding of managerial work and career. Paper is divided in three parts.

First part describes the content and objectives of the interviews as well as the way interviews' results were analysed. The interviews were conducted (face to face or via MS Teams platform) by individual students. Main objective of this project was to mediate students management practitioners' own perceptions of their work and career. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format and were focused on three themes:

- (1) history of the respondents managerial career;
- (2) impact of managerial job on working and private life;
- (3) respondent's advice to young people with managerial ambitions.

Students were asked to interview managers occupying middle or more senior positions. Interviews were analysed in cooperation with students by the means of discourse analysis which represents well-trying method of qualitative data analysis. Parker (2014) defines discourse as a system of statements which construct an object. In reference to "our" interviews discourses can be understood as language "tools" by the means of which management practitioners construct their work and career. Discourses are argumentative and dilemmatic in

their nature (Parker, 2014). Therefore, natural part of discourse analysis represents an identification of the dilemmas and contradictions in the ways people describe and construct different “realities”.

Second part of the paper describes the results of the discourse analysis of the interviews. It divides discourses used by managers into three categories:

- (1) discourses associated with promotion into managerial positions;
- (2) discourses associated with description of the impacts managerial job has on working and private life;
- (3) discourses associated with recommendations addressed to students with managerial ambitions.

Analysis of practical and social functions of all discourses led to identification of 10 managerial dilemmas (i.e. dilemma between a role of the personal/professional competencies of a manager and accident/good luck in getting promoted; contradiction between formal power of the managers in organization and their inability to assert/implement changes which might have positive effect on their individual working and private life etc.). These dilemmas can be understood as both explicit and implicit practical problems and questions managers are facing in their everyday lives.

Third part of the paper summarizes and discusses results of the discourse analysis of the interviews. It comes to two important conclusions:

- (1) Managerial work and career represent a highly dilemmatic and contradictory reality. This conclusion corresponds with versatile view of leadership which associates effective management with ability to apply and combine opposing approaches and behaviours in practice (Pavlica et al, 2015);
- (2) Discourse analysis represents both a useful methodology for analysis of the language/texts and an approach which stimulates students' ability to critically reflect reality.

**Keywords:**

Management, managerial work and career, semi-structured interviews, discourse analysis, managerial dilemmas, versatile leadership.