Business Survival and Mortality: A Qualitative Approach to Small Business Retailers

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The purpose of this article is to understand the relationship between the reasons given by small business owners for the continuity and closure of their companies and the reasons presented by Environmental Theories. In order to achieve this goal, the article started from the understanding that qualitative research "[...] places the researcher in the world, consisting of a field of material and interpretive practices that make the world visible" (Denzin, Lincoln, 2000, p.3) and therefore, we opted for an entirely qualitative approach in their field research, which is related to data collection and analysis (Deslauriers; Kérisit, 2008). The technique used was the thematic interview in depth considering the elements of life history and oral history, always privileging the emergence of narratives anchored in the lived world of the subjects interviewed. We chose thematic interviews in depth to understand that it allows the recall of the daily, the acting of the subjects. The field phase occurred in the months of November and December 2010 with owners and former owners of small supermarkets retailers Potiguarés. The interviews were based on scripts conceived in the perspective of freedom of the interviewee in front of the interviewer’s stimuli, being: a script for owners of "open" markets, and another script for market owners that closed their activities. At each interview, one participant indicated another owner to be interviewed. The main limitation of the field phase was the access to subjects that fit the second type of informant: closed business owners. Despite the indications of other known owners, only one consented to participate in the research. After the interviews were conducted, they were fully transcribed. The analysis phase was constructed from two levels of analysis which was constructed from two levels of analysis, namely: (i) reflections on the individual narratives, and (ii) reflection on the totalizing narrative. The first level of analysis tells the story of each subject from his first professional experience to the present, and presents a dialogue between each story and the Environmental Theories. In the second level of analysis, the emerging empirical dimensions are presented and discussed in the entire narrative, and also discussed with the Theories in question. The analytical process of the totalizing narrative about the object of study allowed the identification of several units of meaning that together are structuring the themes that guided the discussion and were considered as empirical dimensions, namely: motives of openness, motives for continuity and grounds for closure. The results allow us to state that the group of interviewed owners believe that the reasons for mortality and survival of small businesses emerge as a permanent tension between voluntarism (properly human) and determinism (systemic). And environmental theories point to motives for mortality and survival theoretically framed in a polarized fashion, seeming to prescribe watertight, modeling options for actors who mediate the organization-environment relationship.

Keywords: Qualitative methods. Historical methods. Organizational studies. Interculturality.
References
