

Professional Transition in Brazil and the Need for Career Vision Review

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Abstract

This work considers the fact that former employees of privatized public companies in Brazil are examples of the social changes that were imposed and that led people to rethink their careers, starting in the 1990s, when privatization reached public organizations. Before privatization, these companies were characterized by a stable workforce, which favored planning professional life connected to the organization for which one worked. After privatization, both those who remained in the institution and those who resigned went through a professional transition, requiring adaptation to a more volatile environment. This article aims to analyze personal career management of employees at privatized public organizations after the professional transition process. In the quantitative phase of the study, *probabilistic sampling* was considered, obtained through proportional stratified random sampling. For definition of the study population, 385 respondents were randomly selected from 22,300 employees at the time of privatization, with 122 respondents completing the mandatory items. The final sample consisted of 56 people who resigned and 66 continuing employees, equal to 1.29% of the total sampled population, with a 95% confidence level and a maximum error of 8.8%. For the qualitative phase, which was explanatory in nature, the interview technique was applied. The quantitative results showed that even if the company disappears, the way people manage their careers tends to remain. Attitudes repeat during transition and influence subsequent career management. These results were confirmed in the qualitative phase, confirming the existence of a personal career management style.

Introduction

Current economic and social trends favor the emergence of careers not just contingent upon professional opportunities offered by organizations, but also on personal and family needs of workers (Veloso, 2012). A "successful career" is no longer focused on a single organization and starts to be open to various possibilities, with more flexible composition (Costa, 2013).

Since the 1990s, many authors have accepted the assumption that individuals must now take responsibility for their own careers and professional development (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Arthur, Inkson & Pringle, 1999; Mainiero & Sullivan, 2006). This phenomenon is due to the fact that the world has become more global, complex, diverse and individualistic, and also to the fact that it is increasingly difficult for organizations to track and manage the careers of their members (Schein, 2007). In this scenario, organizational hierarchy, which used to have pyramid-like contours, started to take on network

characteristics and length of service in the company was no longer synonymous with career success (Costa, 2013).

Concurrently, there is the issue of how careers actually outperformed organization-focused models (organizational careers) and made room for new, more independent, flexible career models focused on individual (boundaryless careers and protean careers) (Clarke, 2013). In Brazil today, there is a movement that leads companies to concerns over talent management (Barreto et al. 2010; Silva, Pires, Veloso & Plochow, 2013). The intensity of such concerns, especially for retaining people, lead to the deduction that companies are once again hoping that talented people will develop careers with long-term ties to organizations. At the same time, reflections on career also need to consider the fact that people who used to work in companies that offered stable jobs and planned their careers based on that offer of employment will often need to adapt to completely different working conditions and will be forced to rethink their careers (Veloso, 2012).

In light of this scenario, this work considers the fact that former employees of privatized public enterprises are examples of the social changes that were imposed and that led people to rethink their careers in Brazil, starting in the 1990s, when privatization became part of the reality at public organizations (Saavedra, 2004). These companies, even those not wholly public, were characterized before privatization by stable staff, and the few layoffs were usually motivated by just cause or by the desire to resign, which favored the planning of professional life linked to the organization.

After privatization, changes in the patterns of demand over workers meant that both those who remained working at the institution and those who resigned went through a professional transition, which entails the need to adapt to a more volatile environment. This article aims to analyze personal career management of employees at privatized public organizations after the professional transition process. The institution studied was Banco do Estado de São Paulo S/A – **Banespa** (Sao Paulo State Bank), which was a *Mixed Capital Company*, but retained characteristics of a public company by having the State of São Paulo as its majority and controlling shareholder. Banespa had 22,300 employees¹ in November 2000, at the height of the privatization process, when it was sold to the Spanish Group Santander. Banespa employees had close and emotional relationships with the company and they did not believe that the sale of the institution would actually go through. Hence, studying the occupational transition of these employees allows for an understanding of the situation of people affected by abrupt changes in their professional context.

To meet the proposed goal, this article is divided into the following sections, aside from the introduction and closing remarks. The next section presents the theoretical framework that provided the basis for the study's design and analysis of results. Then the research methods are explained, and finally, in the last section, the results are presented and analyzed.

Theoretical Framework

This section presents the concepts that guided the study's design and analysis of the results. In addition to addressing professional transition and the need to manage one's career, the context of careers in Brazil is presented below.

Context of careers in Brazil

In recent decades, careers and companies have endured the impact of changes caused by globalization, technology and diversity in the workplace. Until the 1960s, a career meant an individual's linear and stable relationship with the company that employed him/her. The relationship between these two parties was lasting thanks to a tacit agreement between them:

the employee gained job security in exchange for loyalty to the organization. The logic was the hierarchical professional rise: the higher the level achieved, the greater the rewards (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). In Brazil, Kilimnick (2011) notes adherence to the global trend, defined since the 1990s, where solid and lasting careers within the same company are replaced by more fluid and flexible working bonds. On the other hand, with the impact of economic growth cycles, business managers show increasing concern over the need to retain people in their organizations (Baker et al., 2010).

Such transformations, just like those that have taken place in other countries, have occurred in Brazil and are characterized by particular economic and social times. Overall, Bastos (2000) notes the importance of study of careers that, by articulating personal decisions and organizational personnel management processes, allows for an understanding of how social players (individuals and organizations) are reshaping the employment scenario. The author believes that the study of individual or organizational transitions is an indispensable focal point for understanding the various contextual changes.

In Brazil, economic and organizational changes have followed global trends. However, the timing of such changes has not always been similar to developed countries. Dutra (2011) points out that the discussion about careers in companies and in the job market only began taking shape in the 1980s, and only since the 1990s did individual career management begin to be discussed. That was the moment that triggered the study of careers within the protean and boundaryless career notions, latent in the 2000s, which led to the concept of individual career independence in relation to organizations. (Arthur, Inkson & Pringle, 1999).

This new focus of Brazilian career studies is essentially consistent with Dutra's finding (2007, 2008, 2011) of the need for career management in companies operating in Brazil, an environment undergoing major change, to adapt to the new working reality in which career is no longer synonymous with position, and individuals no longer have their professional lives conducted by an organization. These changes lead individuals to make changes in their careers and subject themselves to situations that offer the experience of professional transitions, as discussed below.

Professional transition

Professional transitions can be motivated by personal decisions to seek new challenges, or by other situations that require adaptation to new realities, such as losing a job or a proposal to change jobs. Whichever the case, social changes that provide for greater mobility between careers also make this type of transition more frequent (Veloso, 2012).

Hall (2002) references Levinson (1986, 1996) to state that people today devote half of their adult life to transitions, and that this is normal. In Hall's (2002) point of view, the increased permeability of organizational boundaries makes it more common and more acceptable for people to undergo transition on their own initiative, exploring new career options and deciding the next steps along their professional path. This movement, which might have been seen negatively in the past, is now considered a natural and desirable behavior (Veloso & Dutra, 2011). To better understand this trend, the transition types identified by authors dealing with this subject are presented below.

The current preoccupation with professional transition is related to the trend of employees today being more focused on personal career planning. According to Kilimnick (2011), the changes that led to the end of solid careers generated insecurity and instability, with an emphasis on employability. On the other hand, Dutra (2002), states that in times of crisis and job scarcity it is natural for people to be more concerned about career planning. However, even in transition situations that are not related to reduced professional options, this is a critical and uncomfortable moment.

According to Ibarra (2004, 2009), the number of people in transition to completely different professions has increased considerably over the past two decades. In his narrative, telling stories of people who switched careers, the author concluded that substantial financial reserves and family support do not make it easier to deal with the feelings (confusion, loss and insecurity) usually experienced during the process. According to the author, some points stand out as indicators of the most common career change patterns, as well as a set of strategies that the author calls *unconventional strategies*, which at times resemble disorderly behavior patterns.

When relating the idea of professional transition to the case of former Banespa employees, it is important to note that this company, whose majority shareholder was the State of São Paulo Government, retained characteristics of a public company. Among other factors, this was because employees were hired through a recruitment examination process and had the opportunity for job tenure until retirement. This context led its employees to cultivate a close and emotional relationship with the company, considering themselves the *Banespian family*.

For Banespians, we can say that "these employees were playing by established rules, not written by them, and changing the rules of the game mid-career can engender serious loss of welfare for the employee" (Saavedra, 2004: 2007). However, for many these changes can also mean the opportunity to adopt more independent behavior in professional decisions, which can have a positive aspect. This situation of occupational transition makes it clear that career management is a latent demand these days.

The need to manage one's career

The notion of flexibility is imposed on workers. Fewer and fewer will be protected by organizational boundaries and they need to plan their careers independently. However, saying that changes in career behavior arise only in response to organizational changes is a simplistic view. The growing awareness among workers about their personal needs independent from organizations must also be considered (Veloso, 2012).

In this context, career management is necessary for both companies and people. People have a responsibility to manage their own professional development and competitiveness. Companies are responsible for offering support and the conditions for a relationship of mutual leverage between company and employee expectations (Dutra, 1996). Corroborating studies by Dutra (1996), Veloso et al. (2011) and Veloso, Silva and Dutra (2012) evidenced the relationship dynamics between employee and organization in terms of employee perceptions on professional growth within organizations and the connection between such perceptions and the career system offered by the company. Despite evidence that workers need to be more independent in managing their careers, authors such as Clarke (2013) recognize that organizational careers may be relevant and desirable.

Methods

Quantitative phase

To explore the professional transition of former Banespa employees, the quantitative phase considered a probabilistic sample (Selltiz et al., 1987), obtained through a proportional stratified random sampling. For stratification purposes, two groups of respondents were assigned: 1 - group that continued working at the institution after privatization: **Active**; 2 - group that left the institution through the PDV (VRP - Voluntary Resignation Program), 2001: **PDVs**. It warrants emphasis that we believe both groups of respondents went through professional transition; hence they are all considered "former employees".

For definition of the study population, we consider that the financial institution's staff at the time of privatization consisted of 22,300 people, among which approximately 4,300 were not eligible for the Voluntary Resignation Program because they enjoyed some kind of stability at the timeⁱⁱ. Therefore, in this work the *target population* consists of approximately 18,000 people, among whom around 8,200 left the institution and about 9,800 remainedⁱⁱⁱ. Of these 18,000 former Banespa employees (target population), only 9,433 (4,211 who joined the PDV and 5,222 who remained working at Santander) were registered in the association that provided the lists of former employees for the random selection. Thus, these 9,433 former employees are considered the population sampled in this survey, conducted in 2008, by which time the transition was considered consolidated.

385 respondents were randomly selected, but during the data collection process, 122 respondents completed the mandatory items on the proposed form. Thus, the final sample consisted of 56 PDV resignees and 66 Active employees, representing approximately 1.29% of the total sampled population. Considering a 95% confidence level, the maximum error was approximately 8.8%.

To develop the survey instrument, aside from the theoretical framework, it was decided that the cut would be sectional, with longitudinal perspective, and that the level would be individual (Vieira, 2004). Hence the proposed form, consisting of dichotomous scales, contained questions about attitudes related to career divided into three distinct phases: during employment in the stable company (Phase I), in the first years after privatization (for Active employees), or during the first years after leaving Banespa (for PDV resignees) (Phase II); currently (Phase III).

For the analysis of demographic data, an exploratory data analysis was performed using several statistical tests. To analyze attitudes related to the three career phases of respondents through the following strategies: exploratory data analyses, to calculate the percentages related to the proportion of respondents for each question, for each of the phases considered during the survey. Then, from the pool of answers to attitudes, in the Yes and No categories, the following tests for each stage were conducted in order to identify answer patterns: Hypothesis testing by group - within each question; unilateral Z hypothesis testing for proportion. To verify the possible association between answers from phases II and III, controlled by phase I, the Cochran-Mantel-Haenszel Test - Conditional Independence Test was performed.

Qualitative phase

In the qualitative phase, which was explanatory in nature, the interview technique was applied. In order to minimize the possibility of bias mentioned by Selltitz et al. (1987), to determine the qualitative sample, we opted to conduct a random draw for each group from among the respondents in the quantitative phase. 10% of respondents were selected from each quantitative phase group. Considering the expected difficulty in making contact, rather than the planned 10%, 20% of elements were randomly selected for potential replacement of missing respondents. The type of sampling in each group was simple random sampling. (Barbetta, 2002).

Following these criteria, the final sample of respondents from the quantitative phase of the Active group consisted of 66 elements, so the selection reached 14 members of this group (approximately 20%), but only 7 of them (approximately 10%) were interviewed. In the PDV group, made up of 56 respondents from the quantitative phase, the selection reached 12 members (approximately 20%), but only 6 of them (approximately 10%) were interviewed, following a semi-structured script, with questions that supplemented the quantitative phase.

The analysis of qualitative material was performed through content analysis (Bardin, 1977). The recorded interviews were transcribed and organized into coherent spreadsheets with the chosen analytical techniques, defined based on the work material.

Presentation and analysis of results

In presenting the results, it is important to inform you that the results are partial, because they are part of a broader research study.

Overview

In the quantitative phase, the age of Active employees ranged between 38 and 54 years, and in the qualitative phase, between 46 and 51. The age of PDV resignees ranged from 35 and 60 in the quantitative phase and between 41 and 56 in the qualitative phase. The observation of respondent ages indicated an aggravate for the transition of these professionals: the professional identity of these people was no longer forming.

The group of Active employees consists mostly (73%) of men, while among PDV resignees, although men are represented by the largest proportion (57.14%), they are not statistically the majority of the group. In the qualitative phase, among Active employees there is only one female respondent and in the PDV group all are male.

Only 5.4% of PDV resignees in the quantitative phase returned to the banking sector after the transition, so most of them began to have different occupations from the Active employees. On the other hand, most of the Active employees in this phase indicated that they took on positions of greater responsibility within the organizational structure of Santander-Banespa. There was a shift from operational positions to other positions, such as operational management. These trends were confirmed in the qualitative phase, indicating that both groups underwent career transition.

Relationship with the organization

In the quantitative phase, answers to the extra request for the respondent to summarize Banespa in one word and then do the same for Santander show that the transition had contours of strong dissatisfaction. Positive definitions regarding Santander-Banespa were rare among Active employees, 16.4%. These definitions revolved around *professional growth, opportunity, challenge*. Among PDV resignees, no positive definition was identified. Neutral definitions (between 13.1% of Active employees and 23.6% of PDV resignees) are exemplified by the words *company, bank, work, efficient*. Negative definitions, which stand out in both groups (70.5% among Active employees and 76.4% among PDV resignees), revolved around *betrayal, exploitation, insecurity, indifference, instability*.

The comparison between definitions of Banespa and definitions of Santander-Banespa conveys the image that respondents in both groups see the two organizations as opposites, for example, *Security vs. Insecurity; Stability vs. Instability, Friendship vs. Indifference*. The analysis of these definitions illustrates the idea of discontinuity experienced by both groups and allows us to identify the career break for these workers. This is consistent with Quishida's (2007) identification of implementation of the career transition process, which goes through the following stages: entry, advancement, reassessment, reinforcement and new entry, preceded by a *break*.

Career linked to the organization and the pressure for transition

In the quantitative phase, one of the prominent results is that the career of Banespa employees, especially members of the Active group, was strongly tied to the company while working at Banespa; 77% of Active employees and 59% of PDV resignees said they had not

defined professional goals outside the company; 77% of Active employees and 43% of PDV resignees were not willing to leave their jobs to get where they wanted professionally; 70% of Active employees and 41% of PDV resignees did not discover new job opportunities and sought to take advantage them. The vision of career linked to Banespa is reflected in the difficulties reported by respondents:

"I just kept focused on that activity that I performed, forgetting to see the world as a whole, understand?" (Interviewee 3 - Active employees).

"Since I left the bank, I'm still not working, just applying." (Interviewee 2 - PDVs)

In the qualitative phase, it was also possible to detect the fact that everyone felt pressured to join the Voluntary Resignation Program, but reactions were different: Active employees remained working in the institution, among other reasons, as a way to overcome difficulties and face pressure and challenges; on the other hand, PDV resignees perceived this same pressure as a factor that made it practically impossible to continue working at the institution. In other words this group saw no possibility of not joining the PDV.

Continuity of career management pattern after transition

In the quantitative results, we were able to verify that even if the company where people works ceases to exist, the way people manage their careers tends to remain. Among Active employees and PDV resignees, most of the proposed questions had the same answer pattern (Yes or No) in the three phases. In other words, most respondents who took (or did not take) a certain attitude in the first phase, continued with the same posture in the following phases. According to our analyses, positive attitudes during the Banespa era were strong enough to be repeated at the time of transition and to still remain today. In general we can affirm that the attitudes shown by respondents during the time they worked for Banespa influenced their professional attitudes when the bank was privatized (in the case of Active employees) or at the time of termination from the institution (in the case of PDV resignees), and also influenced their attitudes with respect to current career management.

These results were confirmed in the qualitative phase, as only one respondent from each group denied the positive influence of attitudes shown in the Banespa era with respect to managing occupational transition, leading to the possibility of a personal career management style.

Difficulty in using relationships in the transition

An important verification of the quantitative phase was the negative answer pattern between Active employees and PDV resignees when questions revolved around the formation of *professional networks*. Similarly, in the qualitative phase interviewees from both groups indicated that the deliberate building of relationships geared toward professional growth and mobility was not part of career management attitudes in former Banespa employees.

A clear way to face new work situations relates to learning, and this was an investment by former Banespa employees, because in the quantitative phase, answers in the three stages showed that 63% of Active employees and 71% of PDV resignees sought to constantly learn things that could enhance their professional worth. Other questions that returned a positive answer pattern for the two groups were related to continuous learning for professional development and initiative for constant learning. The results show the importance placed on workers constantly investing in education, even at times when they feel that their jobs are stable.

Final Remarks

In this article, the analysis of the professional transition of former Banespa employees was permeated by reflections on the need to revise the traditional career vision, where work tied to a public organization led to the job security that many employees longed for. In the analysis of results, we see Saavedra's (2004, p. 207) statement that "changing the rules of the game mid-career can result in serious loss of welfare for the employee" as coherent, because we can see that the patterns of work and job security have changed dramatically for both groups, as much for those who left the institution as for those who remained working at Santander after privatization.

In addition to practical aspects of the research, it is important to consider the assertion made by Ibarra (2004, 2009) that substantial financial reserves and family support do not make it easier to deal with the feelings (confusion, loss and insecurity), usually experienced during the process. The moment of transition, besides being challenging, can be considered a critical moment when the way one's career was managed at previous times becomes evident and influences choices.

Beyond these remarks, we emphasize the fact of the surveyed workers having worked at the same company for a long period of time, which constitutes a limitation of this study. The prerequisite of having worked at Banespa may represent a limitation to the analyses in a reality permeated by a very particular organizational culture. In this case, future studies with these research instruments applied to former employees of companies with different characteristics could provide different results, and enhance the analyses and interpretations, allowing for data comparisons.

Another contribution of this study is the expanded social insight with respect to career management in Brazil. The lifelong change in job perspective for workers who started their careers through civil service examinations, who are seen socially as civil servants, means a change in how career stability in the Brazilian public sector can be seen today. In other words, even professions considered stable in the past can not be regarded as untouchable today.

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