

Career social representations: a study with professionals of different ages

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Abstract

This research aims to analyze the formation and structure of career social representations (SR) for professionals of different ages who work in the business area. The Theory of Social Representations (TSR) guided the study carried out in a sample of 174 young professionals (between 18 and 29 years old) and 105 older professionals (from 45 years old). Methodologically, a questionnaire containing questions in free evocation format was applied, and the data were submitted to OpenEvoc and Iramuteq software. The results of the structure and dynamics of career SR for the groups indicated, at the same time, the presence of similar and distinct elements. Moreover, these results contradict, in part, the literature on career and generational characteristics, indicating the relevance of aspects related to the socio-historical context to explain career SR. The data contribute to the understanding of career SR, enabling new debates and (re)readings.

Keywords: Social representation; Developmental age groups; Young adults; Career.

Representações Sociais de Carreira: Um Estudo com Profissionais de Diferentes Idades

Resumo

Esta pesquisa busca analisar a formação e a estrutura das representações sociais (RS) de carreira para profissionais de diferentes idades inseridos na área de negócios. O estudo realizado em uma amostra de 174 profissionais jovens (entre 18 e 29 anos) e de 105 profissionais mais velhos (a partir de 45 anos) teve como norteador a Teoria das Representações Sociais (TRS). Metodologicamente, foi aplicado um questionário que continha questões em formato de evocação livre, sendo os dados submetidos aos softwares OpenEvoc e Iramuteq. Os resultados da estrutura e da dinâmica das RS de carreira para os grupos indicaram, ao mesmo tempo, a presença de elementos semelhantes e distintos. Também, esses resultados contradizem, em parte, a literatura sobre carreira e características geracionais, indicando a relevância de aspectos relacionados ao contexto sócio-histórico para explicar as RS de carreira. Os dados contribuem para o entendimento das RS de carreira, possibilitando novos debates e (re)leituras.

Palavras-chave: representação social; grupos etários; jovens; carreira

Representaciones sociales de carrera: un estudio con profesionales de diferentes edades

Resumen

Esta investigación busca analizar la formación y la estructura de las representaciones sociales (RS) de carrera para profesionales de diferentes edades que actúan en el área empresarial. El estudio realizado con una muestra de 174 profesionales jóvenes (entre 18 y 29 años) y 105 profesionales mayores (a partir de 45 años) se orientó por la Teoría de las Representaciones Sociales (TRS). Metodológicamente, se aplicó un cuestionario que contenía preguntas en un formato de evocación libre. Los datos se analizaron mediante el software OpenEvoc e Iramuteq. Los resultados de la estructura y la dinámica de las RS de carrera de los grupos indicaron, al mismo tiempo, la presencia de elementos similares y distintos. Además, estos resultados contradicen parcialmente la literatura sobre carrera y características generacionales, indicando la relevancia de aspectos relacionados con el contexto para explicar las RS de carrera. Los datos contribuyen a la comprensión de las RS de carrera, posibilitando nuevos debates y (re)lecturas.

Palabras clave: Representación social; Grupos por edad; Jóvenes; Carrera.

Introduction

Nowadays, outstanding characteristics of the world of work, such as the acceleration of technological advances, market volatility and uncertainty about the future have profoundly impacted society and organizations (Vasconcellos & Neiva, 2019). This scenario favored a new work context, requiring modern and innovative ways to examine careers (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009).

Careers, which were previously characterized by stability and vertical progression in the organizational hierarchy, called traditional, are acquiring other attributes and becoming more horizontal, unstable, dynamic and fluid (Pinho, Kilimnik, & Andrade, 2015; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). In this new contemporary career model, the company's responsibility for the employee's career is reduced (Pinho et al., 2015), which directs the individual to be responsible for managing their career and for their development.

We currently observe the presence of these two career models (traditional and contemporary). The study by Pinho et al (2015) demonstrates that people can have different values in relation to careers, and may be more adherent to the contemporary career model or the traditional career model. Within this perspective, it is understood, for this study, that career is a “multidimensional construct influenced by psychological, social, economic factors and by the concrete circumstances experienced by the individual throughout their life cycle” (Magalhães & Bendassolli, 2013, p. 440).

In the contemporary and dynamic context of the organizational world, work and the future in the career are considered as the central point of attention of individuals (Boehs & Silva, 2017; Vasconcellos & Neiva, 2016). In addition, organizations have people of different ages who have different ways of acting, thinking and seeing the world (Comazzetto, Perrone, Vasconcellos, & Gonçalves, 2016). Thus, in organizations, both young and older professionals are observed. For the delimitation of this study, young professionals are considered those between 18 and 29 years old and older professionals are those over 45 years old.

The differences between these two groups have been observed in several studies. For example, according to research involving older individuals, born between 1946-1964, who were employed and had mostly completed higher education, it was found that this public seeks employment guarantee and aims to build a stable career in the company they work for (Fantini & Souza, 2015). In another investigation with older professionals, born until 1964, employed in medium and large companies, the following values were identified: strong appreciation of identification with work, security and tranquility that work provides for them and for the family (Veloso, Dutra, & Nakata, 2016). Furthermore, in a study conducted by Satuf, Monteiro, Pereira, Esgalhado, Afonso, & Loureiro (2018), on the influence of job satisfaction on subjective well-being, it was identified that older professionals mostly with higher education and employed, between 50 and 68 years old, reported higher levels of satisfaction with their colleagues, with their salary, with promotions and with the nature of their work compared to other generations.

On the other hand, when investigating young university students, with an average age of 23 years, Freitas and Oliveira (2017) point out in their research that, in general, this group thinks about the future in terms of professional and personal success, aims to achieve good financial conditions, tends to associate the professional

future with personal effort, wishing, at the same time, to exercise a profession that brings personal satisfaction. Another study, developed by Sá, Lemos and Cavazzoti (2014), indicates that young people between 21 and 30 years of age with higher education and work experience of at least one year have career expectations that reflect both the traditional career model and the more contemporary model. In this way, these young people seek in their careers vertical growth in the company, training promoted by the company, attractive remuneration, recognition and security for the future and have the expectation of rapid ascent, search for satisfaction, challenge and autonomy and valuing flexibility and quality of life (Sá et al., 2014). In the end, the authors conclude that the contrast between the results observed and the literature on careers and young people brings more questions than answers and claim that, even being a group from the same socioeconomic stratum, the characterization of a homogeneous generational profile is questionable. Although the authors do not carry out this analysis, the data are also a reflection of the current reality in which the traditional and contemporary career model coexist.

In the case of research that refer to the young public, it is also relevant to highlight the current context of the labor market in which they are inserted. Young people have been indicated as one of the groups most affected by the increase in the unemployment rate (Corseuil, Poloponsky, & Franca, 2018).

Due to these particular contexts, it becomes increasingly relevant to study the different generations that work in the labor market (Comazzetto et al., 2016). In this scenario, there is also a need for inter-generational studies that give greater importance to issues involving the career construct. Thus, there was an interest in investigating and analyzing the social representations (SR) of careers present in the discourse of professionals of different ages in the business area. For this purpose, we used, as a theoretical-conceptual contribution, the Theory of Social Representations (TSR). The use of TSR in this study is related to the possibility of investigating the career phenomenon in order to articulate both individual and social and cultural issues, since SR are the result of the engendering between the individual and the social reality (Moscovici, 2015).

In short, SR are configured as a form of common sense knowledge, being socially shared and as a means by which human beings represent culturally constructed objects of their world (Trindade, Santos, & Almeida, 2014). Thus, the representation works as

a system of interpretation of reality that guides the actions of individuals in relation to their physical and social environment (Abric, 2003).

One of the processes that clarify how SRs are formed and what they produce is anchoring (Trindade et al., 2014). Its goal is to anchor unknown ideas in common categories and images, and make sense of the social object within a context (Moscovici, 2015). Thus, two relevant aspects are considered by Jodelet (2015) about anchoring: enables the description of the structural condition of the representation as the result of an interaction between the social object, the individual and the social frameworks of its memorization, and allows to reconstruct its genesis, finding in its origin and in its functions a certain organization.

Trindade et al. (2014) understand anchoring as an incorporation or assimilation of new information from an object in a system of familiar and functional categories to individuals. For them, anchoring enables the connection of the object of representation in a system of values specific to the individual, naming and labeling it according to the links cultivated with social inclusion.

In addition to the basic original propositions in TSR and in order to understand the career SR of young professionals and older professionals, through the analysis of social influence, anchoring, of transformations and comparisons between the SRs, we chose to cover the structural approach inaugurated by Jean-Claude Abric in this study, also termed as the Central Core Theory (CCT). This approach is a theoretical strand, complementary to TSR, which seeks to resolve the two apparent contradictions listed in the characteristics of SR: they are at the same time stable and mobile, rigid and flexible, and also consensual, but marked by strong inter-individual differences (Abric, 2003). To resolve these distinctions, the SRs function as a unitary entity, governed by a double internal system, each part having a specific but complementary attribution, they are the central system and the peripheral system (Abric, 2003; Wachelke & Wolter, 2011; Wolter, 2018).

According to CCT, the central core (CC) is made up of one or more elements, which give meaning to the representation. The CC is determined by the system of values and social norms and has stability as a property, ensuring the continuity of SR in mobile and evolving contexts, providing consensus, coherence and resistance to change (Abric, 2003; Wolter, 2018). The peripheral system allows the anchoring of the SR in reality, therefore, it is more flexible, admits adaptations, oppositions and contradictions, being possible

the integration of the lived experiences (Wolter, 2018). In addition, they act as action schemes, allowing the formulation of representation in concrete terms, being determined by everyday practices (Abric, 2003).

Given the above, the objective of this research was to investigate and analyze how the formation and structure of careers social representations (SR) for young and older professionals working in the business area take place. In this sense, we point out that the structural approach supported this study in a systematic way, as we consider important issues such as social influence, anchoring, internal organization, and, finally, comparisons between the SRs. In a way, we still hope that this study favors the structuring of a space to discuss and examine the careers of individuals and groups, as well as being framed as resources that bring information to society in general.

Method

Participants

Research participants formed two groups: young professionals and older professionals who work or have acted at the tactical or operational level of business entities, public and private administration and non-profit entities. For young professionals, the inclusion criteria for participation were: 1) to be between 18 and 29 years of age; 2) to be properly enrolled in subjects of the last three semesters in undergraduate courses in the business area; and 3) to have at least six months of professional experience, as with this experience it is possible to learn about the dynamics related to the world of work and career; similar procedure was adopted by Sá et al. (2014). For older professionals, it was required: 1) to be at least 45 years old; 2) to be a business graduate; and 3) to have at least one year of professional experience in the business area. These inclusion criteria favored the construction of a sample, in socioeconomic terms, belonging to the middle class. It should be noted that, in this study, the business area is understood as the field of administration, accounting and economics. This delimitation by area was established by considering that these environments are conducive to raising, in more detail, discussion and reflection on career management.

A total of 337 people participated in the survey. From this sample, we excluded 58 for not meeting some of the criteria defined for the research. As a result, we obtained 279 valid responses, of which 174 were from young professionals and 105 from older professionals.

The average age in the group of young professionals was 22.98 years old (DP=3.32), 97(56%) were women and 4.37 years (DP=4.13) was the average length of professional experience of this sample. For older professionals, the average age was 53.30 years (DP=8.94), 71 (68%) were men and 32.88 years (DP=14.35) was the average length of professional experience in the business area of this group.

Instruments

To access the career SR of the participants in this research, we used a questionnaire that contained questions in free evocation format as a data collection instrument. In order to detail the representation in structural terms, the researched groups provided five words or expressions from the inducing term "career". For a methodological refinement, we ranked each of the answers, by the subject, according to their order of importance.

Data Collection Procedures

For the group of young professionals, we performed data collection in two Federal Education Institutions, giving priority to the application of the questionnaire in groups, in person, in classrooms. Regarding the group of older professionals, data collection was performed electronically. The sample was chosen for convenience. To facilitate the implementation of this survey, we have the collaboration of three Regional Councils, all from the business area, of an Association of Accountants and a Federal Educational Institution. It was also necessary to use social networks to expand the number of respondents.

We emphasize that the research procedures were performed in compliance with the criteria established in Resolution No. 510/2016 on Research Ethics in the Human and Social Sciences area [*Information omitted for peer review*] under opinion number [*Information omitted for peer review*].

Data Analysis

In this research, we used prototypical analysis and similarity analysis as data analysis procedures. The association of these procedures made it possible to broaden the understanding of career SR.

The prototypical analysis is based on the study of the relationship between activated elements and the representational object based on two criteria: the frequency of the word or expression in the corpus and its average order of evocation (Wolter, Wachelke, & Naiff,

2016). From the crossing of these data, four quadrants are generated, involving four zones in an SR, in which different degrees of centrality of words are attributed (Wolter, 2018). In this way, it is possible to infer which are the central elements and which are the peripheral elements of an SR (Wachelke & Wolter, 2011).

Wachelke and Wolter (2011) explain that the upper left quadrant or first quadrant gathers the words with high frequency and low order of evocation. They are, therefore, the most salient elements and indicate that they are the CC of the representation. The other quadrants correspond to the possible constituent elements of the peripheral system. The second quadrant, indicated as the zone of the first periphery, encompasses the responses with high frequency, but which were later evoked. It represents, then, the secondary elements of the representation, despite showing signs of salience in the responses. The third quadrant, or also called the contrast zone, exposes the less frequent and most immediately evoked elements. This zone consists of minority responses that can only indicate complements from the first periphery, or the existence of a subgroup that considers some elements different from the majority, perhaps even with a distinct CC. Finally, the fourth quadrant represented by the zone of the second periphery refers to little salient elements related both to frequency, as the order of evocation. Therefore, they are less interesting for the structure of the representation of the social group, bringing more individualized aspects.

The data related to the questions of free recall were submitted to analyzes carried out using the computer program OpenEvoc. This tool, built by Sant'Anna (2012), is aligned with the Central Core Theory of SR. Before, however, the data were parameterized based on Zipf's Law and treated using the stemming procedure. The latter consists of grouping words or expressions that share the same lexical stem, with the most frequent response predominating among them (Wachelke & Wolter, 2011). Zipf's Law, called the fundamental quantitative law of human activity, describes the relationship and serial order of words that appear in a sufficiently large text. Through this Law, it is possible to identify three jumps in the distribution of the frequency of words, which are the frequency zones. Words that are very few are in the first zone, words that are not very numerous are in the second zone, and words that are very numerous belong to the third zone (Quoniam, Tarapanoff, Araújo, & Alvares, 2001). Zipf's Law was used to stipulate the cutoff point for evocations. For

this research, the minimum frequency was delimited by the value located at the end of the first zone.

We performed the similarity analysis using the computer program Iramuteq. To perform the analysis, the software is based on graph theory, that is, a “maximum tree” is built whose vertices are the elements of the corpus and the edges are the values of the similarity indices between these items. To reach this result, the program calculates the similarity index between each pair of elements, identifying the co-occurrences between the words (Camargo & Justo, 2013).

Results and Discussion

Through the prototypical analysis, it was possible to identify the structure of career SRs for the researched groups. With three omitted cases, the young professionals evoked a total of 867 words and/or expressions, the older professionals, 525.

Through the evocation lemmatization procedure, it was possible to homogenize the similar semantic content of the cited words or expressions, without changing its essential meaning (Wachelke & Wolter, 2011). Based on Zipf’s law, we established the minimum frequency for inclusion of words in the quadrants. Thus, we consider the minimum frequency of eight in the sample of young professionals, totaling 24 evocations, and six in the sample of older professionals, totaling 20 evocations, corresponding to a little less than 3% and 4% of the sample sizes, respectively.

Regarding the cutoff points for the coordinates of the quadrants, the values were obtained considering only the words included in the analysis and using the mean criterion in the evocation orders. The results were 2.89 for older professionals and 2.83 for young professionals. Words with average order of recall with values lower than these were classified as having low order of recall.

Regarding the cutoff point for frequency, we chose to calculate the average frequency among the responses after excluding the terms with low frequencies. These values were given from the frequency 10.25 for the group of older professionals and 19.96 for the group of young professionals. Thus, words with equal or higher values corresponded to high frequency evocations.

Table 1 indicates the results of the prototypical analysis. From this analysis it can be observed that the word “stability” possibly refers to the central element of the social representation of career for young professionals. This element was more frequent and more

quickly evoked, so it maintains a privileged bond with the object of representation. With regard to the group of older professionals, the words “accomplishment”, “responsibility” and “satisfaction” also stood out with high frequencies and low average evocation orders, probably the elements belonging to the central system of this representation.

The possible organization of the CC of the groups points out differences between them. The central element “stability” for young professionals can be influenced by the current context of the labor market, indicated by the increase in the unemployment rate (Corseuil et al., 2018). Given this situation, it is sensible to think that young people strongly desire stability to build a more solid career. It is likely that, in this time of crisis, this group primarily seeks stability in order to bring more confidence and security to their career. The study by Sá et al. (2014) found similar data indicating that young people seek security for the future, in addition to other aspects. Thus, a complementary explanatory possibility is the presence of a certain predominance of the traditional view of career among young people, as identified by Sá et al. (2014). Another issue that needs to be considered is the lack of experience in the labor market by this group, which seems to contribute to a view that entering the labor market and developing a career is not an easy task. Thus, to understand the element “stability” it is necessary to consider the current context (high unemployment rate and presence of different career perspectives – traditional and contemporary) and the little experience in the job market by this group.

According to the CC of the sample of older professionals, the career is thought of more as an end product of their yearnings, passing through some psychological needs such as fulfillment and satisfaction. The word “achievement” denotes how important it is for this group to achieve what they want. This element seems to be anchored to work-related values found in the study by Veloso et al. (2016). According to this study, identification with work is an important issue, thus, the presence of the term “achievement” in the CC area is understandable.

The word “responsibility” in this constitution, on the other hand, adds a functional dimension, that is, it expresses the idea of a thought connected to the practices of these SR. The high mention of this term may have been motivated by the fact that it is a group composed of more experienced people who seek employment guarantees (Fantini & Souza, 2015) most

Table 1.
Prototypical Analysis Regarding the Inductive Term “Career”

Young professionals						Older professionals					
Central core zone			First periphery			Central core zone			First periphery		
Frequency ≥ 19.96 / OME < 2.83			Frequency ≥ 19.96 /OME ≥ 2.83			Frequency ≥ 10.25 / OME < 2.89			Frequency ≥ 10.25 / OME ≥ 2.89		
40	stability	2.55	76	success	2.89	20	achievement	2.65	18	success	3.67
			48	money	3.21	13	responsibility	2.00	17	stability	3.41
			37	work	3.46	12	satisfaction	2.58	16	work	3.13
			27	future	3.78						
Contrast zone			Second periphery			Contrast zone			Second periphery		
Frequency < 19.96 / OME < 2.83			Frequency < 19.96 /OME ≥ 2.83			Frequency < 10.25 / OME < 2.89			Frequency < 10.25 / OME ≥ 2.89		
19	achievement	2.58	19	profession	3.95	10	recognition	2.70	10	dedication	3.00
18	dedication	2.00	17	job	2.88	10	growth	2.80	7	pleasure	3.14
15	knowledge	2.31	17	growth	3.65	9	knowledge	2.11	7	commitment	3.43
15	study	2.80	15	experience	3.47	9	profession	2.22	7	development	3.71
14	planning	1.79	13	recognition	3.15	9	security	2.67	6	progression	3.50
13	wage	2.79	11	time	3.08	8	remuneration	2.50	6	challenge	4.17
11	objective	1.82	9	remuneration	3.50	7	training	2.14			
10	effort	2.40				6	study	2.17			
10	satisfaction	2.80									
9	responsibility	2.33									
8	development	2.25									
8	progression	2.75									

likely due to a certain influence of the family on the career. Older professionals usually help or provide for the family and according to the research by Veloso et al. (2016) the work ends up providing them and their family with the security and tranquility they so much need.

The word “satisfaction” also stands out in this group. This result is compatible with other studies such as that by Satuf et al. (2018) which points out that older generations report higher levels of satisfaction with all dimensions of work.

It is possible to visualize the peripheral system in the three other quadrants, called first periphery, contrast zone and second periphery. In the first periphery (Wachelke & Wolter, 2011) from the group of young professionals are the elements “success”, “money”, “work” and “future”, in the group of older professionals there are the elements “success”, “stability” and “work”. These words were evoked with high frequency and later evoked.

The second periphery in which the elements furthest from the possible CC of the researched SRs are also highlighted in Table 1. Among the words in this quadrant are “experience” and “time” for the group of young professionals and “commitment” and “progression” for the group of older professionals. This composition individualizes the meaning of career, but regulates and preserves behaviors, protecting the CC (Abric, 2003; Wolter, 2018).

The peripheral system of the SR is able to adapt the group’s thinking to the concrete reality, to the different scenarios external to the representation and the internal singularities of individuals (Wolter, 2018). Thus, the elements that are included in the two structures of this system have varied and peculiar characteristics, they create an aspect of concreteness in the representation and govern behavior. In the contrast zone of the two groups are the elements “study” and “knowledge”. These minority responses may indicate

that for both the young and the older, It is important to always study and expand knowledge, in order to be successful in one's career. For young professionals, when thinking about a career, it is understandable to attribute positions such as effort, objective and planning. For older professionals, we verified the presence of terms related to training, commitment, challenge, pleasure, progression and security. Therefore, the orientation of behavior adopted by the groups in relation to the career is evidenced in this system.

When comparing the SR structure of the groups, we noticed that 14 terms evoked are repeated in the two structures, some being located in different quadrants. Thus, the constitution of these two SRs denotes a state of overlapping of the elements. Possibly, this is because career is a phenomenon that encompasses several elements that are present in the labor market and that are common to both groups.

To understand the structure of career SR, it is important to consider, in this study, the prototypical

analysis as a partial result. The similarity analysis complements and extends access to the internal structure of representations, allowing the study of the relationships between the elements. It is through this joint analysis that the structure of career SR will be better evidenced for the two groups.

For this analysis, the most frequent words were selected to compose the graph, with 24 words in the sample of young professionals and 20 words in the sample of older professionals, using a minimum frequency of eight and six, respectively. The results of these analyzes are shown in Figures 1 and 2. According to the graphs of the similarity analyses, the co-occurrences and indications of connection between the elements of the social representation of the career of young and older professionals can be observed.

We note in Figure 1 that among the elements of the group of young professionals, the word "success" stands out, being a central organizing element strongly associated with the elements "money", "stability" and

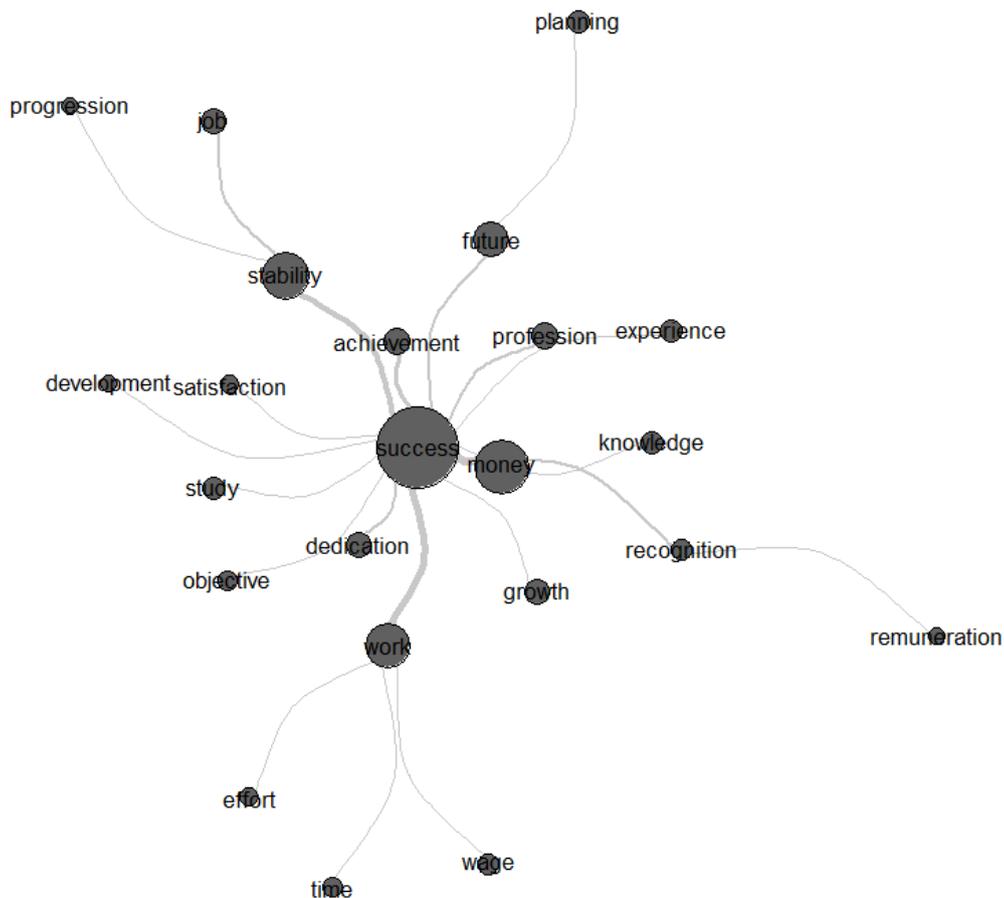


Figure 1. similarity analysis graph of young professionals.

“work”. Other words also branch out from the “success” element, maintaining connections between them. Furthermore, at the extreme of the words “future”, “work” and “stability” there are more ramifications that interconnect the elements. For example, when evoking the word “work”, many subjects in this research associated the words “time”, “effort” and “salary”. Therefore, these are words that are linked together.

Upon further reading, it can be considered that, for young professionals, the “success” element is at the heart of the career debate. This element overlaps in the formation of several webs of thought, being the basis for other elements to connect and walk together, thus reflecting on relevant developments in the structure of the maximum tree. Among the developments are the elements “money”, “stability” and “work” that have a high connection with the term “success” and, therefore, are equally important in this construction.

Other research show that young people idealize expectations of career success, emphasizing financial return and personal satisfaction (Freitas & Oliveira, 2017). Thus, possibly, the term success is centrally rooted in this group’s thinking, opening the way for other observable and measurable elements and for elements that reflect individual perceptions about professional achievements and future career prospects.

Unlike the analysis carried out in the group of young professionals, Figure 2 shows a structure evidenced by blocks. At opposite ends, it is possible to evidence a strong connection between the words “success” and “achievement” and between “stability”, “recognition”. At one end there is the word “dedication” interconnecting other elements in a not so strong way.

By analyzing the results, we understand that two elements, “success” and “achievement”, are more significant in the structure and unite other elements.

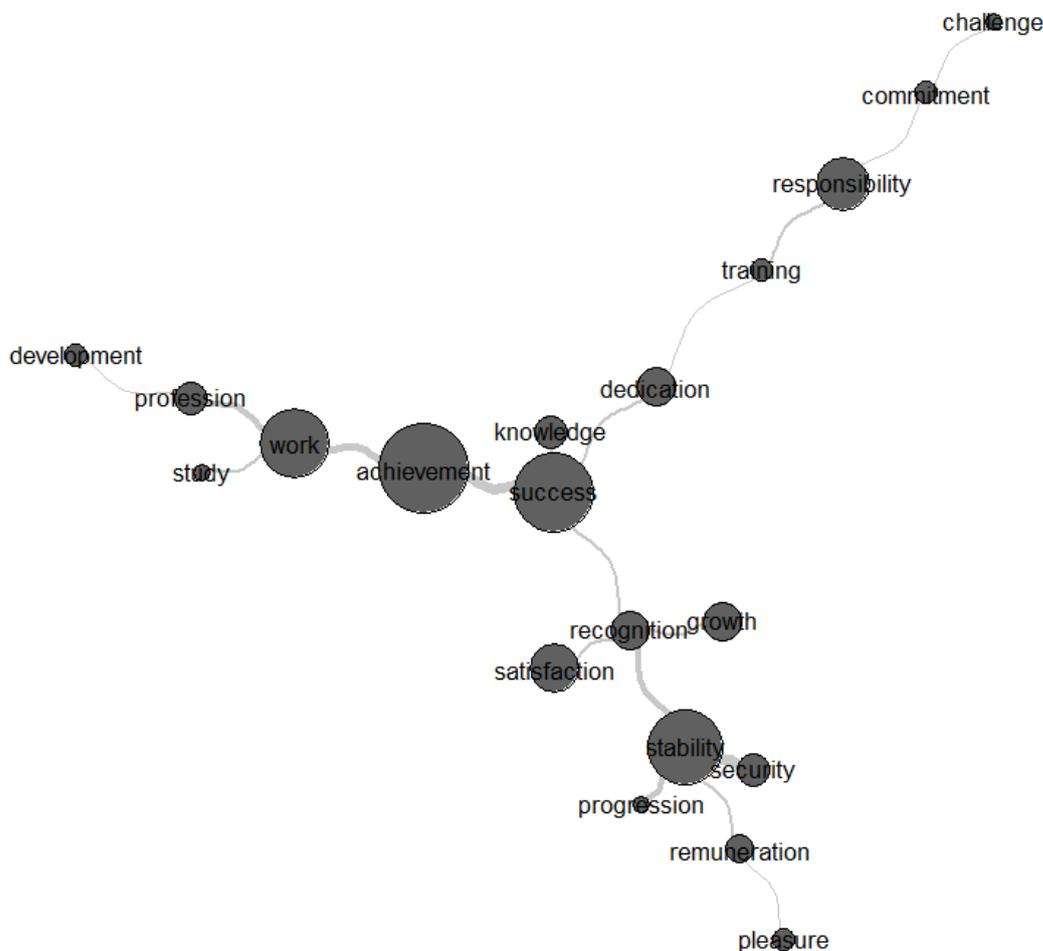


Figure 2. older professionals similarity analysis chart.

This means that for older professionals, in addition to the word “success”, “achievement” also has a great weight when it comes to a career. When the element “achievement” is evoked, older professionals seek a very professional fulfillment, that is, through work, as for personal, through pleasure.

Like young people, older professionals consider success as an important aspect of their career, but achievement also takes on a prominent place. In addition, the ramifications of the words “work” and “stability” come together with other research (Fantini & Souza, 2015; Veloso et al., 2016) who claim that older people aim to build a stable career in the company they work for and that work provides security and tranquility.

Finally, based on the similarity analysis, it is possible to note the existence of a connector that belongs to the two groups that is “success”. This term, in both structures, is located in a strategic place, interconnecting and relating to several other terms. Although this element is not found in the central core, it is at the threshold of the cutoff point. Thus, we can say that it is much closer to the central core than to the peripheral system.

Overall, the meaning of career for the two groups (considering the results of the prototypical analysis and the similarity analysis) encompasses many similar or, sometimes, the same constructs. This reveals that in the common thinking of the groups are embedded some values that are equivalent and that build and sustain the representational object. The similarities can be explained because the two groups experience the same socio-historical context in which the meanings about career circulate, topic considered relevant in contemporary times and in the organizational world (Boehs & Silva, 2017; Vasconcellos & Neiva, 2016).

On the other hand, we also understand that the career for each period of life is different. This difference is in line with the generational issue. Younger and older people, as detailed below, have intrinsic particularities to each belonging group, related to experience, age and career maturity, which make them have distinctive priorities, attitudes and worldviews. Due to this context, career can be defined as a very complex topic, in which multiple components are included in its SR.

Therefore, to point out the groups’ thinking about the representational object, it is necessary to reflect a little more on the essential elements of career SR from the SR structure (given by the prototypical analysis), as well as the connection between its elements (verified by the similarity analysis). Therefore, it is necessary to consider the strong connection between the elements

and the central elements of the representation. In the group of young professionals, the elements “stability” and “success” express a thought that prioritizes the final result of the career, bringing a meaning that encompasses the apex of the process. Thus, the career SR for this group refers to achieving a stability at work that will allow success in the future, what does it mean to have money to support yourself and gain independence.

For older professionals, the elements “achievement”, “responsibility”, “work”, “success” and “stability” are observed, which are related to the understanding of career as a process, it is necessary to go through different stages to reach the desired expectations. Thus, career SR for the group of older professionals is related to the achievement that is achieved through the success that is made possible by responsibility, work and stability.

To delve deeply into the understanding of career SRs, it is necessary to include the anchoring process in this analysis (Jodelet, 2015; Trindade et al., 2014). In this study, the elements that involve the social representation of career for young and older professionals are anchored in spatial and temporal aspects of each group, that is, in the current moment of life and over time. It is understood that the young professionals who participated in the research are at a stage that corresponds to the end of university studies and the beginning of insertion in the labor market. They are, exactly, located at a time when a more concrete relationship with the professional world is established, with even more initial contact with training, experiences and work practices. By anchoring career SR at this point in life, young people classify it according to these links that the object maintains with its social insertion (Trindade et al., 2014). In addition, with regard to anchoring related to temporal aspects, it is interesting to note that young people think a lot about the future. This is very clear in the structure presented from the prototypical analysis and the similarity analysis. Values, beliefs, prescriptions and actions integrated to the object of representation are referenced to what is projected for the future.

In the case of older professionals, the stage of life they are in involves a different time in their career, most likely one of stabilization and permanence in employment or even retirement. The positions occupied and the experience acquired through the work already carried out lead them to a more advanced level in their career. It is also important to highlight that, unlike young people who think and are based on the future, the older ones anchor the SR in the past state. Their

experiences, their practices, their life and work experiences, their achievements, as well as the relationships that are built over the years and the feeling of belonging in the organization end up giving new meaning to the career in order to see it with a more directed view of what was established at that time. In this way, the career SRs of older professionals are formed with a focus on past practices.

Another issue that influences the anchoring of these SR is the current meaning about career. Currently, we verify the coexistence of the traditional career and the contemporary career (Pinho et al. 2015; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). We observe that these two perspectives are present in the SR structure of the two groups.

The results identified that when comparing the career SRs for the two groups surveyed, similar and different elements are verified, generating in a different organization for each representational structure. This comparison is feasible, as the two groups live in the same workspace and bring to this interaction different interpretations of the same representational object. In this way, the comparison allows to bring subsidies to discuss this interaction, in order to better deal with differences and possible conflicts.

Final Considerations

The analyzes developed during the research were guided by the TSR (Moscovici, 2015). It is, therefore, through this theory, specifically through the process of anchoring the representations, and by the organization of its internal structure, it is possible to understand the lived reality and the common sense thinking of young and older professionals about their careers (Trindade et al., 2014; Moscovici, 2015).

The results of the structure and dynamics of career SR for the two groups indicated the presence of similar and distinct elements at the same time. These results are compatible with the proposal of the TSR that explain the process of construction of the SR through anchoring (Moscovici, 2015; Jodelet, 2015; Trindade et al., 2014). This process allows the insertion of a social object into a value system in order to identify and interpret this social object.

The results are relevant as they demonstrate both the importance of generational aspects and the socio-historical context in the construction of career SRs. The results, at first, contradict the literature on career and generations as they indicate the presence of the term stability for young professionals and achievement

for older professionals. Generational studies have great relevance in career literature, but they reveal only a part of this reality. There are even different studies that question this type of group characterization, as it is not possible to homogenize a whole set of people with different life experiences and social insertions.

This research clearly demonstrates that generational aspects can explain a part of the organization of career SRs, however contextual aspects cannot be neglected. Thus, the results indicate that the context of high unemployment rate that young people find themselves and the contemporary reality in which different career models coexist also influence the formation, structure and dynamics of career SRs.

This research, with TSR as a theoretical scope, obtained results that contributed to the understanding of career SR, enabling new debates and (re)readings. According to Moscovici (2015), TSR aims to explain the links that unite psychology with contemporary social and cultural issues. It is possible to notice that the TSR, in its complexity, vitality and transversality, managed to articulate the individual and social element in the investigation of the studied phenomenon. To apprehend the content of the career SR of these groups, their values, their opinions and their experiences contributed to clarifying the different experiences of the professionals, for the identification of the difficulties faced, as well as for the reflection of behaviors and thoughts that are or that have become common to the groups. In addition, it is possible that the results of this research also generate impacts on career management by the organization. Since the career is not homogeneous for the groups, management must consider this fact and not have a standard model in the company. On the contrary, companies need to have more flexible structures, less hierarchical and directed to the different groups and current careers (traditional and contemporary).

We point out as a limitation in this study the homogenization of data in the treatment of groups. The analyzes that were performed did not consider gender and other sociodemographic data. It is possible that the detailed division of each group could impact the way the career is thought.

In this aspect, it is important to consider gender inequality in labor relations that influence, among others, the disparity between male and female salaries and strategic and leadership positions within companies (Salvagni & Canabarro, 2015). Thus, it would be important to carry out research that analyzed the

differences observed in relation to gender. As proposals for future research, further research on the subject is also suggested, in order to bring to the analysis of the career of young and older professionals the understanding of relevant aspects that were not addressed or that were not deepened in this research. Confirmatory tests of the CC of these SR and ways of studying the distances between the different representational elements can also be recommended as an extension of the paths of this analysis. And, finally, we suggest career SR studies aimed at managers of private companies and public entities, since the view of this audience can expand and provide more subsidies for understanding this subject.

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