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Career Paths, Images and Anchors: A Study with Brazilian Professionals


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Abstract

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Keywords

Career, Models, Transitions, Trajectories, Anchors, and Images

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This article analyses career anchors changes associated to images and professionals trajectories. Its main question: Do anchors careers change through time? We conducted twelve interviews involving professionals from the Administration Area, applying Schein's Career Anchors Inventory (1993). We did the same two years later. In both of them, the Lifestyle anchor was the most found, reflecting the need of a balance between family life and work. It was observed that the main anchors tend to remain as such, but in some cases, it is possible to observe changes which are associated to career transitions. The reapplication of the Inventory supports the use of this tool mainly due the relative stability founded in the career anchors, in different moments. Key Words: Career, Models, Transitions, Trajectories, Anchors, and Images

Some authors have addressed issues concerning labour, employment and career, and emerging from this process we find expressions such as “The Career Chaos”, in allusion to the end of solid and longstanding careers, and to the emergence of careers that are self-guided and built in the passage through various companies (Amherdt, 1999; Chanlat, 1995; McDaniels & Gylbers, 1992).

From a traditional perspective, a career can be seen as the adjustment of a person to a chosen occupation. This process of adjustment implies standards from which arises the concept of hierarchy or sequence of roles with greater responsibilities, within an occupation (Landau & Hammer, 1986).

According to Baruch (2004), the current generation is witnessing the disappearance of limits in various aspects of life. The implications of this phenomenon for careers are that they are becoming increasingly multidirectional. In a *modern* perspective considered by the author, careers are seen as a process of development of the employee through a trajectory of experiences and occupations in one or more organizations (Baruch & Rosenstein, 1992).

Based on this set of changes, a concept much more consistent with the type of careers that are currently being traced seems to be related to the idea of "an occupation or profession represented by stages and possibly by a progression. To pursue a career means to move on in the course of life" (Robert, 1989, p. 259). Or in the more recent definition of Arthur and Rousseau (1996), career is more appropriately seen as “the evolving sequence of a person’s work experiences over time.”

Greenhaus, Callanan, and Godshalk (1999) also proposed a career concept without the typical binds of the *traditional* approach. To these authors, a career would be

a pattern of experiences related to the occupations that comprise an individual's course of the life.

If in the past career studies focused on the organizational career, nowadays they are increasingly focusing on a person's perceptions and self-constructions about career phenomena.

Following this trend, our study presents the results of longitudinal case studies that were carried out with the objective of verifying if career paths are stable or changeable by following career trajectories and obtaining the diagnosis of professional anchors and aspirations in two different stages. In the first, interviews were conducted in combination with the application of Schein's (1993) Career Anchors Inventory, and with the presentation of figures representing careers to twelve professionals that were also former students of a Brazilian masters in Business Administration program. After two years, those professionals were not only interviewed again but they also filled out the Career Anchors Inventory for a second time, and the results of this study are presented here.

Review of Literature

In this topic we present a synopsis of the current knowledge on career in order to contextualize our study and to define theoretical approach used in empirical research. First of all, we went through the development of career's concept of and its implications for professional trajectories. After this we explore Edgar Schein's (1993) approach to career which resulted in his Career Anchors Inventory, used in this study to investigate careers changes. The choose of this approach is based on the idea of the career anchors stability in different moments of professional trajectories.

It is worthy to emphasize that the choice of this instrument was due to the fact it is, at the same time, consistent with the current trend which points out that careers are being self-directed. In other words, careers are currently becoming the responsibility of the individuals themselves, who, consequently, need to be aware of their goals in life and their values regarding a career, developing appropriate skills in order to achieve so. It is important to make it clear, that the aim of this study is not to search for gaps in the career theory, but offer a support to the Career Anchor Inventory by a longitudinal study. Besides that, it intends to extend the research data about transition from traditional careers to protean ones (McDonald, Brown, & Bradley, 2004). That said, in the next section we present the methodology used to carry out the research, and that supported the results of this study.

New Career Concepts and the Implications for Employees

Having conceptions geared both to the educational area - also known as professional careers - and to organizations - or organizational careers - careers in the contemporary world tend to be associated with the professional trajectories of each individual, regardless of the education or organizations where such trajectories are developed.

The modern career transcends the existence of an organization. Currently, emphasis is being given not only to liberal careers but also to the ones related to informal markets. Summarizing, careers, in their modern sense, are in a process of detachment from educational background of their holders, as well as from their linkage with organizations (Balassiano & Costa, 2006).

In the 1990s, as a counterpoint to the organizational career definition structured in time and space, Hall (1996) presented the protean career concept, inspired by the figure of the god Proteus, who in Greek mythology possessed the ability to change his shape according to his will. Hall states that a protean career is a process in which the individual, and not the organization, manages his or her own professional trajectory. It incorporates the varied experiences of the person in the areas of education, training, jobs in various organizations, changes in the occupational field, etc.

Therefore, this type of career is not limited to what happens to a person in a given organization. Instead, it incorporates his or her personal choice of career and quest for self-realization. According to the author, this type of career covers integrative and unifying elements of a person's life. From another angle, it is possible to say that the criterion for success is internal - psychological success - not external.

Hall (1996) argues that the protean career is designed mostly by the individual rather than by the organization, and that it can be redirected from time to time in order to meet the persons' needs. However, from Caldas and Tonelli's (2000) and Carvalho and Grisci's (2002) points of view, the changes which professionals are currently going through can be interpreted as mere defence mechanisms that are triggered automatically and in a conditional way, by environmental inconsistencies and threats, concerns to abrupt changes and management fashions whose effectiveness is questionable (Caldas & Tonelli; Carvalho & Grisci).

In this context, the individual on one hand is increasingly confronted with making choices and is not always ready for it. On the other hand, that same individual needs to fit in a series of requirements from the organizational context and also needs to present a wide range of skills, which may not always fit with the profile needed to build a self-guided or *protean* career. In other words, this paradox - where at one moment the career is self-guided and at the other it is subjected to market dictates and to the organizational context - can be highlighted in the confrontation of ideas among authors who deal with this important issue.

According to Lacombe (2002), a flexible production and a structural flexibility favour the participation and integration of employees through teamwork and cause a weakening of ties between a single career and organization. This increases the chances of an individual to assess his or her own life, stimulating the development of an occupation that can integrate itself to a life project, and also provide greater autonomy to a person's decision making process and to the act of the work itself.

Therefore, the career concept, as a route to be followed, and as "an occupation or profession represented by stages and possibly by a progression" (Robert, 1989, p. 259), becomes misplaced in this new order. It is replaced by ambiguous lateral changes where "people move to the side believing that they are rising in the loose network" (Sennett, 2002, p. 100), and "people who risk themselves by making changes in flexible organizations often have little concrete information about what a new position will entail, and only in retrospect they recall making bad decisions" (Moreira-Albandes & Batistados-Santos, 2004, p. 9).

Career Anchors

Among career studies, we highlight one that considers individual characteristics or values established during career formation. Schein (1993) defines career anchors as the set of self-perceptions related to talents and skills, motives, needs, attitudes and values that people have towards the work they develop or seek to develop. The

occupational anchors are a combination of skills, interests, aspirations and values that represent the essence of the employee. The career anchors in a person's professional life can be used as a way of organizing experiences, identifying areas of contribution throughout his/her trajectory, generating criteria for different types of occupations and identifying patterns of ambition and success that people can determine for themselves. Therefore, they serve to guide, stabilize and integrate a person's career.

In the present study, a scale for the identification of the following career anchors was applied, suggested by Taillieu (1992) and based on the Career Anchors Inventory prepared by Schein (1993):

1. Entrepreneurship: Concern about creating something new, the willingness to take risks and the desire for personal prominence in what is achieved;
2. Technical-professional skills: concern for the development of personal proficiency and expertise, building the career in a specific technical area;
3. Lifestyle: Concern to develop a lifestyle capable of balancing career and family needs, so that none of them becomes dominant;
4. Pure challenge: primary concern with the resolution of problems that apparently have no solution, and the possibility of overcoming difficult obstacles;
5. Autonomy: concern for freedom and independence, and for not being constrained by organizational rules;
6. Job safety: concern with the stability and the guarantee of employment, security, benefits and good quality retirement conditions;
7. Service and dedication: use of interpersonal skills and service assistance to others, commitment to an important life cause and consequent devotion to it;
8. Managing people: central concern with the integration of other people's efforts to obtain results, and also with the articulation of the different functions in an organization.

It is worthy to emphasize that the choice of this instrument was due to the fact it is consistent with the aforementioned current trend which points out that careers are being self-directed. In other words, careers are currently becoming the responsibility of the individuals themselves, who, consequently, need to be aware of their goals in life and their values regarding a career, developing appropriate skills in order to achieve so.

That said, in the next section we present the methodology used to carry out the research, and that supported the results of this study.

Method

As said before, the objective of this study is to verify if career paths are stable or changeable by following career trajectories and obtaining the diagnosis of professional anchors and aspirations.

In terms of methodology, the study can be characterized as an applied research, qualitative in nature. According to Alves-Mazzotti and Gewandsznajder (1999), a qualitative research study involves designating the researcher as the main instrument of investigation.

With regard to its purpose, the present study is characterized as an exploratory type, seeing that, according to Goulart (2002), it has the objective to develop, modify and clarify concepts and ideas, in order to formulate and identify more precise problems and researchable assumptions for later studies.

This article results of a "Career Management, Competencies and Quality of Working Life" research agenda, coordinated by the first author of this paper. This research group is composed by professors from different Brazilian universities.

The Research Participants

In qualitative research the sample size is not as important as in the quantitative research, especially in the longitudinal perspective. According to Taylor and Bogdan (1998) it is necessary to have flexibility in the design of a qualitative research, so the researcher does not need to specify the exact number of informants, being necessary only to have a general idea of who are your potential interviewees.

The study involved the participation of 38 professionals¹ who, at the time, were attending a master's business administration program in Brazil, maintained by a state foundation. The interviewees came through acceptance of an invitation, which was done to all students of this institution. After two years from the initial data collection, twelve professionals of the group were again submitted to interviews, characterizing the study as a comparative and longitudinal one.

Data Collecting

Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted, in combination with the presentation of career representative images (metaphors) and application of the Career Anchors Inventory developed by Schein (1993). When invited to take part in the research, the participants were asked to bring at the time of the interview four figures of their choice - collected in various magazines - that represented their career path. With such material in hands, the participants were submitted to an interview, composed by three steps. At first, they were asked to talk about their career trajectory. Then, the participants presented the figures chosen to represent their career trajectory and their meanings. Finally, they were asked to complete the Career Anchors Inventory.

The reason why we used the evocation of metaphors technique lies in the fact that careers are generally associated with terms such as road, escalating and competitive dispute, among other concepts. The formal theory on careers as well as the thoughts and everyday speeches about them are surrounded by metaphors (Inkson, 2004). Another reason for using metaphors relates to the fact that researchers were already using this procedure in classroom and in activities for introducing new students in post-graduate classes. The transposition of the evocation of metaphors technique to the study of this theme was considered as an interesting and creative possibility. Finally, this study was based on the technique of metaphors reminder, ZMET (Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique), developed by Gerald Zaltman, but it is important to say that it was not a literal application of this technique, because ZMET is a trademark and involves several and more complex steps (Zaltman & Coulter, 1995).

¹ All the ethical questions involved in this study were based on the determinations and orientations of the SISNEP, the Brazilian Governmental office that takes care of the regulation of research involving human beings. (<http://portal.saude.gov.br/sisnep/pesquisador>).

In the analysis of the images, nine key metaphors proposed by Inkson (2004) were considered - careers as inheritance, construction, cycle, combination, journey, encounters and relationships, roles, resource, and history. These metaphors act as structures that cover a great part of the theory on careers, and each one of them presents specific issues about the subject. Together, they have the potential to improve the reflections about careers beyond the elaboration of familiar metaphors, and also provide a broader and comprehensive understanding of the career phenomenon (Inkson).

Finally, after two years from the initial data collection, twelve professionals of the group were again submitted to interviews, and again completed the Career Anchors Inventory, characterizing the study as a comparative and longitudinal nature.

Processing and Data Analysis

Content analysis was used in order to analyse the data collected through the interviews. It was considered suitable for the type of research problem at stake and the objectives involved. The principal analysis categories were: possible variations at the career anchors during the studied period and possible reasons for those events (when they happened); images of career evoked by the interviewees; and possible changes in the career patterns (traditional or protean).

As for the data obtained from the Career Anchors Inventory, they were tabulated and analyzed to obtain evidence about the reliability of the instrument. Therefore, a comparative analysis was applied between the records from interview analysis and the instruments results. All the ethical questions involved in this study as a protection for the participants' safety, privacy and confidentiality, as said before, were based on the determinations and orientations of the SISNEP.

Results and Discussion

Analysis of the Evolution of the Career Anchors Revealed by the Professionals who Participated in Both Stages of the Research

During our study, the main anchors found at the time of the first application of the Career Anchors Inventory (Schein, 1993), in 2005, were: *Lifestyle* (15 interviewed, 37%), *Pure Challenge* (8 interviewed, 18%), *Service and Dedication* (5 interviewed, 14%) standing out, among the respondents, the pursuit for a better balance between career and family needs.

In the second application, with twelve participants, we observed a predominance of the *Lifestyle Anchor*, which can be confirmed in Table 1, although, in the case of interviewed E1, it became secondary in importance, giving place to the other, like *Technical-professional Anchor*.

In some cases such as E8, E9 and E10, however, a complete change of anchors was observed, which happened concomitantly with the career trajectories of the individuals researched, which changed from a traditional profile to another one more adherent and in line with current trends. This is the case of E8, a data processing expert who began to act as lecturer in business administration and, at the same time, has been very keen in guiding students. His initial anchors were *Entrepreneurship* and *Pure Challenge*, which gave place to the *Service and Dedication Anchor* (related to the development of educational activities) in the second application.

Schein (1993) also states that interests, values and skills should serve to guide, indicate, stabilize and integrate careers and, with these in mind, a person won't go through the risk of becoming a *ship tossed around by the direction of the waves*, also making use of metaphors here. He adds that when people aren't aware of their anchor, external incentives may tempt them to accept situations or occupations that are not satisfactory, which could lead them to experience sensations like: "*this really wasn't for me*".

Some interview passages obtained in this study provide strong evidence regarding Schein's (1993) assumptions, such as these from E4, Marketing and Communications consultant, participant of the first and second interviews²:

During great part of my life I had serious doubts if I had chosen the... The right career, because in fact I have a great talent for music, I'm a good musician [...] and I chose not to develop a career in art, in music [...] I chose to go through [...] a more conventional path. Then I went to college, I graduated in communication, in advertising, and even in advertising I didn't pursue the best option which would be to work with writing, and I chose to hold on to the opportunities that emerged, maybe based on a short term point of view, which was to work, to show results, so I chose the opportunities that came front, which led me to be a consultant. (E4)

This figure here looks like a mess, doesn't it? It's a figure that doesn't mean anything, that actually reminds confusion, and I understood it as if it were like the confusion I always thought my career has been until today, and this has reflected even at my performances, even at the companies I started; in fact, I started three companies until today, two develop market research and one works with computers. (E4)

Anyway, this confusion, until recently, was very present in my life, concerning what should I do - things were not going well, they weren't getting to the result I wanted, to the result they need to get to, and I haven't reached the place I wanted, so this matter has always been confusing due to this pressure. (E4)

This interview, although he is suffering the consequences of not following his true professional inclinations and being aware of it, chose to continue his activity of market researcher, probably as a result of investments made by him in this profession. He has positioned himself, however, in a more mature way, investing in his technical expertise. He also remains self-employed, which is consistent with his secondary career anchor (Autonomy).

² The underline is ours

Table 1. Interviewee data and their respective Career Anchors (2005 – 2007)³

Code	Degree/ Diploma	Marital Status	Children	Gender	Age (years)	Main Anchors (2005)*	Main Anchors (2007)*	Career Images or Metaphors	Career Patterns
E1	Economy, Administration and Accounting	Married	2	Male	54	<u>Life style and Service and dedication</u>	Technical and professional skills and <u>Life style</u>	Network, Technological innovation, new information, competition, family safety - career as Encounters and Relationships	Traditional to protean career (from the public service to consultant to small and medium enterprises)
E2	Social Communication	Married	1	Female	33	<u>Pure challenge and Life style</u>	<u>Pure challenge and Service and dedication</u>	Variety of career options, adventure, challenge, pleasant work, network - career as Encounters and Relationships	Protean career since the beginning (consultant to teaching)
E3	Psychology	Married	2	Female	48	<u>Pure challenge and Service and dedication</u>	<u>Service and dedication</u>	Dedicated choice, New professional experiences, success related to being able to help people - a career as a legacy and perfect fit	Protean career since the beginning (teaching to head of school)
E4	Social Communication	Married	4	Male	53	<u>Service and dedication and Autonomy</u>	Technical and professional skills and <u>Autonomy</u>	Irregular career, looking for dreams and challenges, frustrations, constant restart, family security. A career as a journey or a cycle, full of storms	Protean career since the beginning (from sales to the market research and teaching)
E5	Administration	Married	1	Male	40	<u>Life style</u>	<u>Life style</u>	Career to be built and modeled, multiplicity of ways, Balance between personal and professional life. A career as secondary in relation to personal life	Traditional to protean career (from industry to own commerce)
E6	Data Processing Technology	Married	-	Female	28	<u>Life style and Technical and professional skills</u>	<u>Life style and Technical and professional skills</u> and Pure Challenge	Career linked to technological innovations and technical and professional competence Career as construction Link between the	Traditional to protean career (From IT analyst to teaching, more recently)

³ Source: Direct research, 2007; The underlined words refer to career anchors that kept as principal or secondary anchor.

Table 1. Interviewee data and their respective Career Anchors (2005 – 2007, Continued)

Code	Degree/ Diploma	Marital Status	Children	Gender	Age (years)	Main Anchors (2005)*	Main Anchors (2007)*	Career Images or Metaphors	Career Patterns
E7	Administration	Single	-	Female	29	<u>Life style and Service and dedication</u>	<u>Life style</u>	A career as stages or seasons, directing career, balance between personal life and work; Career as a construction	Traditional to protean career (From Human Resource area to planning analyst and teaching)
E8	Data Processing Technology	Married	2	Male	44	Entrepreneurship and Pure challenge	Service and dedication	A career as a journey and a perfect fit.	Traditional to protean career (IT analyst to management and teaching)
E9	Law	Divorced	2	Male	45	Service and dedication	Life style, Safety at the job and Entrepreneurship	Family safety and professional growth Career as legacy	Protean Career (work at family business and teaching, more recently)
E10	Civil Engeneering	Single	-	Male	42	Pure challenge and Technical and professional skills	Life style	Disorientation earlier in the career, maturity in other stages. Career as a journey and perfect fit	Traditional to protean career (from engineering to head of school and teaching, more recently)
E11	Data Processing Technology	Married	1	Male	34	<u>Life style</u>	<u>Life style</u> and Technical and professional skills	Different paths, diversity of opportunities, difficulty in choosing, a need to focus and specialization, Career as a construction and perfect fit	Combination of traditional to protean career (IT analyst and teaching)
E12	Psychology	Single	-	Female	28	<u>Pure challenge</u> and Life style	Technical and professional skills and <u>Pure Challenge</u>	Career as a construction and a perfect fit	Traditional to protean career (from Human Resource area to teaching, more recently)

Career Images and Metaphors

Within the twelve cases studied, the career images *Construction*, *Journey* and *Encounters and Relationships* were the most frequent ones, associated to the ideas of career focus and direction, knowledge pursuit, constant innovation and new opportunities and challenges. Other career metaphors, different from those mentioned by Inkson

(2004), were also identified, such as: career as *Family*, representing stability, affection and tranquility; career as *Technology*, symbolizing the need for innovation and continuous upgrading; and finally career as *Competition*, symbolized by representations such as rally, marathon, etc.

Career images related to *Roles*, *Resources* and *Cycles*, typical in Inkson's (2004) referential were not identified in this study. The career image *Legacy* is present in the case of E3, which explains his vocation for teaching through a strong paternal professional influence, and also based on a true vocation, different from what one might imagine, since family influences are often associated to non-vocational choices, opposed to the *Perfect Fit* or *Construction* career images.

We obtained images that, even though they could be fitted within image categories associated to journey and construction, they represented precisely the opposite, that is, career deconstruction, mismanagements, lack of preparation, disorientation and multi-direction. Examples of this are waterfall spilling in different directions, ships tossed around by the direction of the waves, fan, and even abstract figures representing career chaos, chosen mainly by the interviewee E4, Marketing and Communications consultant, who regrets not having followed an artistic career.

We agree with Inkson (2004) that careers, like organisations, are complex entities; each metaphor has its own strengths and weaknesses, its applicability and inapplicability to a specific situation, and true understanding can only be reached when considering a wide range of metaphors, which should be subject of further and more profound studies, as outcomes from this research.

Career Trajectories: Traditional or Protean?

Generally, the career trajectories analyzed, even from a longitudinal perspective of a relatively short period of two years, indicate a tendency in favour of *protean* or *boundaryless* careers.

In the cases of E6, E11 and E12, technical analysts and teachers, their roles in a predominantly technical and specialized area suggest a traditional career. However, such a definition is not entirely true, considering their movement towards an academic career, which presents several typical characteristics favouring careers without boundaries, as indicated by Baruch and Hall (2003), like a flat structure (but quite rigid), professionally based; individually it leads to where lateral and even downwards movement are accepted; upwards mobility is limited and even not desired; cross organizational moves (but not cross functional) have become the norm for career moves and, perhaps more fundamental, the academic career model built on networking within and across organizations.

On the other hand, the career trajectories of E1, E2, E3, E4 (even though he considers his career as traditional, in comparison to a musician career), E5, E7, E8, E9 and E10 provide plenty of evidence in favour of the *protean* career, not only because they aim towards an academic career, but also because they have been through various companies, and, in some cases, they even gave up alternatives which provided better security and stability prospects, in order to accomplish their aspirations and career anchors. This is the case of E1, who resigned from an important public agency in order to dedicate himself to the family business, and, currently, is a business consultant and associated to an important support agency for small and micro entrepreneurs. His career is characterized by several transitions, initially to meet his aspirations and career anchors and, later, mostly due to certain circumstances (failure to save his family business).

The trajectories of E1, E2, E3, E4, E5, E7, E8, E9 and E10 clearly indicate that there were changes in their career trajectories, very characteristics of a protean career. E2, a professor and Marketing and Services consultant, describes her career in the form of a *zig and zag*, because of its many transitions, which is consistent with her *Pure Challenge Anchor* and with a great ability to promptly create networks wherever she is established. Thus, the multi-direction of her career corresponds to the multiplicity of residences and jobs: from one city to another, considering that she teaches in several colleges. Likewise, she describes the development of activities in the area of marketing, consulting, advisory and teaching. There is a guideline, her education in Marketing, which guarantees a minimum of career identity, but does not prevent it from being characterized as protean.

E4's speech is similar: from music he shifts to advertising, where he describes his work to be divided between being a consultant and writing, two areas of interest. He reveals an entrepreneurial character, having started three companies in the areas of information technology and market research. Currently, he is a professor and also an entrepreneur, developing market research. As E2, he demonstrates instability during some time of his career, with a certain tendency to stability, but not based on formal ties such as a job in a single company.

E10 begins his career as an employed engineer, but left engineering to be a teacher and entrepreneur, opening a school for students with learning disabilities. When awarded with his Masters, he also began teaching in higher education. As other individuals surveyed, he has several transition moments in his career, where his self-determination shows.

E3 demonstrates more consistency both in his education and careers relate to teaching, but are multi-directive when moving geographically from one state to another, and by that, assuming the position of high school director and, concomitantly, working with higher education.

E1 begins his career in a traditional way, as a bank clerk, but leaves a possible and predictable stability to take on family business. Since it did not work out, he became a consultant/adviser and intends to work as a teacher. It appears that, like the other professionals, he builds a career that varies according to his career anchors, influenced by environmental pressures or insinuations, which bring changes to his professional inclinations.

The common feature among the sample, in a smaller or bigger manner, is that they were not actually going through their careers in a traditional way. This protean attribute present in the respective careers leads them to accept the challenge of changing their career trajectories, which occurs in different intensities, leaving the careers without a hierarchical or linear print throughout their development. Thus, this behavior points out a protean career arrangement indicated by the interviewees' career anchors, but is also affected by external and occasional circumstances. The confluence of all the individuals surveyed towards teaching also allows us to characterize these careers as protean, since the professional from a specific area is subjected to stimulations that permanently change, requiring new responses at each legal and institutional situation, even in those arising from teacher-student relationships inside the classroom

Conclusions

The career trajectories analyzed, as well as the career metaphors, proved to be examples of trends such as the need for a systematic expansion of individual skills and enhancement of technical knowledge acquisition, however, associated to a pursuit for personal development. They also reflect a general search for new occupational alternatives without having to necessarily abandon a current activity, since we live in a moment characterized by instability and constant change. Through the images of career given by the interviewees, we can observe in a more abstract way, how their career evolved, and what values and feelings guided their career paths. According to the interviewees, the images helped them to find a “leitmotif” of their career experiences, in a way that what did not seem to have any connection or structure, had some logical sequence at the end of the interview.

This study contributed in identifying the most indicated anchor in both applications, the *Lifestyle* anchor, reflecting a need to balance family life and work. Also, it was possible to observe that the main anchors diagnosed generally remained as such, but in some cases, the positions were inverted, and secondary anchors came in front. In fact, within other cases, we observed a reconfiguration of anchors, which occurred concurrently with the career trajectories of those surveyed, whom changed from a traditional profile to another closer to the current trends. Certain changes in the anchors are most likely related to new career demands that, paradoxically, may be leading some professionals to leave aside their values and aspirations, even if temporarily. It could also be a tendency of the professionals that redirect their careers to the academic area.

In despite of such findings, we recommend further studies in which the influences of contextual factors and new occupational demands within individual career anchors should be better investigated, in a longer period of time between the first application of the instrument and the other.

The most important contribution of this study, therefore, is in the fact that some obtained images, even though they could be fitted within image categories associated to Journey and Construction, they represented precisely the opposite, i.e., career deconstruction, mismanagements, lack of preparation, disorientation and multi-direction, which could enrich the referential of Inkson (2004).

We recognize that one limitation of this study is the fact of tracking the respondents for only two years, a relatively short period of time. Another one is the exploratory nature of this study, which involves a small number of participants.

Additionally, it is worthy to mention that the reapplication of the career anchors questionnaire and the qualitative analysis of its possible variations provided evidence that was favourable to the use of this instrument both in research and in diagnosis of career guidance. Such conclusion is explained by the fact that the anchors remained relatively stable, consistent with the career trajectories analyzed and enabling the explanation of possible mismanagements and failures, which could be due to the lack of consideration of these professionals in relation to their anchors.

It is also significant to point out the importance of the participants’ observations, with regards to the applicability and contributions of the Career Anchors Inventory, as their results were considered consistent with their perceptions about themselves and their careers. This study provides, thereby, a qualitative support to the Schein’s (1993) Anchor Career Inventory.

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