The Role of Political Competence in the Career Self-Management Process: A Qualitative Study

O Papel da Competência Política no Processo de Autogestão de Carreira: Um Estudo Qualitativo

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ABSTRACT

Abstract: The aim of this study was to investigate the role of political competence in the career self-management process. The sample of ten graduate students in the city of São Paulo, with more than six years of experience in the labor market, was interviewed using a script developed based on the theoretical framework. Data were entered into the ATLAS.ti v 7 software to perform qualitative content analysis. The results showed the importance of a multidisciplinary approach to the career and the interdependence between the different social actors involved in the work, through the exercise of political competence, regardless of the type of employment relationship and hierarchical level. This study will help to expand knowledge about the means by which it is possible to obtain better career results and to transform potentially negative situations into positive ones in organizations. The originality of this research stems from the proposal of a new model of career self-management that contemplates the needs of contemporary careers and includes professionals without a management position in the debate on the organizational political arena. To generalize the results, it is suggested to apply a survey that reaches a more representative sample of the population. **Keywords**: contemporary career; work transformation; interdependence; person's role.

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RESUMO

O objetivo deste estudo foi investigar o papel da competência política no processo de autogestão de carreira. A amostra de dez alunos de cursos de pós-graduação da cidade de São Paulo, com mais de seis anos de atuação no mercado de trabalho, foi entrevistada usando roteiro desenvolvido com base no referencial teórico. Os dados foram inseridos no software ATLAS.ti v 7 para realização da análise qualitativa de conteúdo. Os resultados mostraram a importância de uma abordagem multidisciplinar da carreira e da interdependência entre os diferentes atores sociais envolvidos no trabalho, por meio do exercício da competência política, independentemente de

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RESUMO

tipo de vínculo empregatício e nível hierárquico. Este estudo ajudará a ampliar o conhecimento sobre os meios pelos quais é possível obter melhores resultados na carreira e para a transformação de situações potencialmente negativas em positivas nas organizações. A originalidade desta pesquisa está relacionada à proposta de um novo modelo de autogestão de carreira que contempla as necessidades das carreiras contemporâneas e inclui os profissionais sem cargo de gestão no debate sobre a arena política organizacional. Para generalizar os resultados obtidos, sugere-se a aplicação de uma pesquisa que alcance amostra mais representativa da população.

Palavras-chave: carreira contemporânea; transformação do trabalho; interdependência; protagonismo da pessoa.

Introduction

In times of economic crisis, creativity, knowledge, and innovation are being integrated into economic processes and elevated to the status of the world's most important resources, especially for growing populations with limited natural resources (DUBINA et al., 2011).

As a reflection of these changes, new work configurations have been adopted worldwide, such as matrix structures, systemic structures, network organization, and virtual organizations, causing authority and responsibility to be diluted and increasingly assigned to several members of the organization, thus extending traditional forms of control and command to self-managed teams (OCASIO et al., 2020).

These new configurations have been promoting the decentralization of power through participative management and project teams. Thus, authority and responsibility are being increasingly assigned to various members of the organization, requiring more and more protagonism of individuals – one of the components of career self-management – to achieve professional success (BLICKLE et al., 2009), since the interactions in the work context today are much more a function of the performance of temporary tasks due to the dynamics of projects and/or the development and improvement of products.

Furthermore, as a result of the advent of technology, organizations began to give greater importance to data than had the organizational hierarchy, with the power of decision-making no longer resting with those who hold a position, but with those who have the critical and analytical ability to interpret and transform reality

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from what the data communicate. However, for an individual who has no formal authority to obtain the cooperation of other professionals, it is necessary to have influence and political skills (PFEFFER, 2013; ABDALLA; AL-ZUFARI, 2020).

Thus, the more dynamic and complex the organizational environment is, the more organic interaction and decentralized decision-making must be allowed among people capable of understanding and solving organizational problems, responding to contingencies through mutual adjustment as a coordination mechanism (MINTZBERG, 1995; LALOUX, 2017), and people's protagonism so that efficiency can be increased through power and authority delegation.

In this context, career self-management and political competence come to be considered key answers for individual and organizational success, since through career self-management it is possible to contribute to the development and power upgrade of people and organizations. Moreover, through the acquisition and improvement of political competence, it is possible to exert influence on decision-making processes that are becoming more decentralized every day in contemporary organizations. Improving political skills can help in the process of career self-management and, consequently, improve the work performance of people who work in large or small teams, in industry or retail, leading or being led (FERRIS et al., 2005).

The problem that guided this research was the perception of the existence of competence gaps when it comes to the concept of career, based on the assumption that it is important that individuals and all those who carry out career interventions – inside and outside organizations – have the relevance of political and social factors in mind, as well as career self-management. The justification for the development of this research was the identification of an opportunity for the development of a conceptual model of career self-management as a result of the analysis between the data obtained in this research and the theoretical references researched.

The general objective was to analyze political competence and its relationship with the process of career self-management. The specific objectives were to: (1) identify whether individuals in search of professional self-development consider themselves politically competent; (2) verify the importance of including political competence in career self-management programs; and (3) evaluate whether the inclusion of political competence in the agenda of discussions about career self-management depends on hierarchical level.

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Theoretical Foundation

In Brazil, the concept of career self-management is still more associated with the fact that the career has become an "individual enterprise," as it places the individual as responsible for the self-management of his or her performance (FONTE-NELLE, 2007). However, although it seems contradictory, in this study, the concept of career self-management will be approached from the understanding that there is no "solo career." This is because, given the many variables that make up the work context (formal or informal), the role of the protagonist is always shaped by the other since others assess and validate what we do, be it a colleague or a manager, which makes us protagonists always compared to other protagonists (SZNELWAR, 2015).

Although performance is important at work, research (PFEFFER, 2013; FER-RIS et al., 2005) reveals that this is not the only determining factor for success in a career, and these studies present political competence as a relevant factor for organizational survival and for the achievement of better results, given the fact that organizations are essentially political environments (MINTZBERG, 1985; PFEFFER, 2013) since their resources are limited. This means that the decisions of those who work in these organizations are not always made for rational reasons but for the personal agendas and interests of the decision-makers.

ORGANIZATION AS A POLITICAL ARENA

In organizations, all employees have power, which can be obtained through different sources, such as position, personal attributes, tasks performed, interpersonal relationships, and knowledge (MORGAN, 2002; OCASIO et al., 2020). As resources that individuals or groups control, the sources of power favor the exercise of power over other people, both to challenge and to reproduce the formal structure of organizations (CLEGG; HARDY, 1999).

The configuration of the organizational political arena occurs because the decisions made therein are not only based on rationality but also work and career interests of individuals. Although rationality is an inherent element of political action, since strategies are employed to achieve individual or group objectives (LAWLER; BACHARACH, 1983), the decision-making content is still influenced by personal

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interests because "no one is neutral in the management of organizations - not even administrators" (MORGAN, 2002, p. 210).

Disputes in organizations can happen because of scarce resources. Generally speaking, the scarce resources that lead to disputes in organizations are budgets, investment, wage bills, physical space, position, formation of coexistence rules, and rules of access to scarce resources. In this study, "resource" is related to what has value and importance to individuals and on which other people depend (INESI et al., 2018), such as money, information, knowledge, access to important people, or decisions.

Even though it is an invisible component of the organizational setting, the political arena can be perceived by the people who transit through it (DUTRA, 2019; OCASIO et al., 2020). Three dimensions are significant in shaping the political arena: personal interests, conflicts, and power (MORGAN, 2002). Awareness of these dimensions and the way they interact can favor professional performance (MORAES; TEIXEIRA, 2020).

Politics in the organizational environment is related to the struggle of different individuals and/or groups to impose their standards and criteria and implies the use of tactics to deal with opposition and maximize their influence through the creation of coalition networks (LAWLER; BACHARACH, 1983). In many cases, coalitions, political agreements, and cross-party alliances are the means used to achieve objectives in organizations. Since they are permeated by political processes, political skills are relevant because they contribute to dealing appropriately with competing interests in a positive way (MELO, 2017).

POLITICAL COMPETENCE

At the beginning of the debates about competence, the American and French literature presented different definitions of the same concept. Americans believe competence would be more related to the needs established by the positions or positions held in organizations (FLEURY; FLEURY, 2001), i.e., more focused on knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for the performance of the functions assigned. For the French, competence would be associated with the person's contribution in the context in which it is inserted, from the proper understanding of the demands of the context (DUTRA, 2019).

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In this study, the concept of competence will be adopted as "a responsible and recognized knowledge to act, which implies mobilizing, integrating, and transferring knowledge, resources, and skills that add economic value to the organization and social value to individuals" (FLEURY; FLEURY, 2001, p. 188).

Given the complexity of the organizational context, an expanded perspective should be adopted that considers a political and sociological approach to careers, which takes into account the role of power and influence in organizations (INESI et al., 2018). Research related to the concept of "politics" in the organizational environment is associated with "political intelligence" and "political skills." In this study, we decided to adopt the term "political competence" since the term "competence" involves both intelligence and skill and can be developed through training, mentoring, and socialization (MUNYON et al., 2014).

Political skills have been defined as the ability to effectively understand other people at work and use that knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance personal and/or organizational goals (FERRIS et al., 2005; GRANGER et al., 2019). For this to happen, one must understand the other person's perspective with the goal of understanding preferences, values, and needs (MUNYON et al., 2014).

> Political skills are characterized as a positive set of social skills. We could say that they address conflicts and difficult interpersonal situations, turning potentially negative situations into positive ones. Politically-skilled individuals have the ability to neutralize conflict situations and turn them into productive encounters (FERRIS, 2019, p.1).

Research results reveal that political competence is positively related to self-efficacy beliefs, career success, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, productivity, salary increase, and personal reputation (MUNYON et al., 2014; CHATURVEDI et al., 2018; GRANGER et al., 2019; LI; MA, 2019; MORAES; TEIXEIRA, 2020; ABDALLA; AL-ZUFARI, 2020). FERRIS et al. (2005) defined four dimensions of political skill (Chart 1). Politically-skilled individuals combine astuteness – prudence – with the ability to adjust their behavior to different situational demands so that it appears sincere, inspires support, trust, and effectively influences and control the responses of others.

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Chart 1 The four dimensions of political skills.

Social Astuteness	Interpersonal Influence	Networking Skills	Apparent Sincerity
The ability to understand social interactions and accurately interpret their own and others' behaviors in social contexts.	The ability to adapt and calibrate their behavior to diverse situations to achieve goals in different contexts.	The ability to develop friendships easily, build strong alliances and beneficial coalitions, and take advantage of relationships when faced with opportunities.	The ability to be or appear to be honest, open, and forthright with a high demonstration of integrity, authenticity, and sincerity.

Source: Adapted from Ferris et al. (2005).

Politically-skilled professionals are able to achieve organizational goals through the understanding and influence they reveal in social interactions at work and to increase their own sense of control over their careers (FERRIS et al., 2005).

CAREER IN ORGANIZATIONAL LITERATURE

Several definitions of the concept of "career" can be found in the literature. This is because the concept can be analyzed from different perspectives. A career can be analyzed from the individual's perspective, becoming associated with satisfaction and personal fulfillment. Moreover, it can also be analyzed from the organizations' perspective, involving norms and rules linked to human resources management. In this study, the concept of "career" will be defined as a sequence or evolution of a person's work experiences over time (ARTHUR; KHAPOVA; RICHARDSON, 2017).

In the English language, the word "career" originally meant a road for carriages. The term was applied to work as being a channel for the person's economic activities throughout life (SENNETT, 2015). Originally, the definition assumed that the person would use their work potential in a single organization, and indeed, this is what happened in many cases. However, in actuality,

> People are driven to think their careers within totally different parameters, with the company exerting less and less reference for their decisions and using more and more themselves the opportunities offered by the market as a basis for their professional positioning and construction of their future (VELOSO; DUTRA, 2010, p. 4).

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Career theories are divided into two major groups, which are traditional and nontraditional careers. Traditional careers emphasize the interdependence between career and organization and are basically defined as organizational careers, usually associated with a single lifetime employment scenario.

The concepts of non-traditional careers emphasize the importance of the person's protagonism. The protean career, the career without borders, and the intelligent career are the most frequently mentioned non-traditional careers in the literature.

The protean career values self-awareness, adaptability (HALL, 2004), and the prioritization of personal values contrasting them with organizational values (BRISCOE; HALL; DE MUTH, 2006). The protean career is characterized by the "multiform" ability to constantly reinvent oneself in the face of changes in the environment.

The borderless career has physical – intraorganizational and interorganizational – and psychological mobility between the person and the company as central factors (KOST et al., 2019). In this context, networking (social networking) and learning are key to avoiding dependence on a single organization (KHAPOVA, ARTHUR, AND WILDEROM, 2007).

A smart career involves using one's intelligence in building one's career as individuals are able to answer these three questions: (1) "why do you work?" by demonstrating clarity regarding one's identity and motivational needs, as well as clarity in identifying and giving meaning to work; (2) "how do you work?" by demonstrating that one knows how to gather the skills that are important for the job; and (3) "with whom do you work?" by demonstrating that one knows whom one should interact with to form supportive interpersonal networks (ARTHUR; KHAPOVA; RICHARDSON, 2017; CHATURVEDI et al., 2018; GRANGER et al., 2019).

CAREER SELF-MANAGEMENT

Career self-management, also known as "career management from the individual's perspective," is based on self-direction and intrinsic value orientation (HALL et al., 2018). Self-direction happens as the person becomes the agent in charge of his or her career and not the organization or anyone else anymore. Intrinsic values act as a guide in the career decision-making process.

Although the career self-management model has been spreading in recent years, some individuals – and organizations – still show a preference for the tradi-

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tional career model. People seem to be torn between the need for a certain level of stability and security, as well as a certain level of challenge, variety, and novelty, and most of them are not fully independent or willing to move (BRISCOE; HALL; DEMUTH, 2006).

> There is, on the part of people, a natural resistance to planning their professional lives because they see the professional path as something given and because they haven't had any stimulation throughout their lives. Resistance to individual career planning is still very strong in Brazil; people tend to guide their careers more by external appeals, such as remuneration, status, prestige, than by personal preferences (DUTRA, 2010, p. 59).

People who tend to perform the process of career self-management more easily are those who show proactive behavior (SLEBARSKA; FLAKUS, 2020), i.e., they perform intentional actions to realize their career goals and anticipate future problems, needs, or changes. They tend to show initiative in performing their activities and build a good network of relationships to assist them in their career, thus obtaining emotional support, information, career counseling, and professional opportunities (DE VOS; SEGERS, 2013).

Career self-management must be carried out recurrently, considering that the effectiveness of a specific strategy adopted in the present may not be the same in the future. The self-management process must be performed dynamically, involving the simultaneous execution of a set of behaviors chosen according to the situation experienced by the professional (KING, 2001).

The situations that involve the need for a professional qualification before a change in the area of activity, or even the need for professional requalification, are examples as the career evolves, i.e., when the complexity of the tasks performed increases.

> The career can be thought of in steps of complexity. In other words, as people incorporate more complex attributions (a set of functions and activities performed by people) and responsibilities (a set of decisions required from the person by the organization), they develop and add more value to their environment (DUTRA, 2017, p. 8).

The ability to do career self-management involves a good level of self-knowledge, the ability to diagnose the current situation, and planning for the desired state.

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Besides focusing on analyzing options and self-knowledge, testing possibilities, that is, action, is also relevant (IBARRA, 2003).

Based on a synthesis of publications on career planning, Dutra (2010, p. 62 and 63) proposes six steps that should be considered in the construction of a professional project, namely: (1) self-knowledge; (2) knowledge of the market; (3) career goals; (4) career strategies; (5) action plan; and (6) plan follow-up.

POLITICAL COMPETENCE AS PART OF THE CAREER SELF-MANAGEMENT PROCESS

The study of career-related problems requires a multidisciplinary view so that there are multiple perspectives on careers and the environment surrounding them. Since careers change according to context, more consistent answers to career-related problems should be sought through a view that analyzes psychological issues and how they affect individuals' choices, adaptation, and satisfaction at work, sociological issues from the analysis of behavior and role adoption in the organizational environment, and economic issues regarding how human capital increases through education and career experiences directly impacting profitability in organizations.

A model that seeks to integrate a multidisciplinary view into the study of career-related problems was proposed by King (2001). The model strength (Table 2) is that it considers the political and social dimensions of careers since organizations are political spaces.

Chart 2 Career guidance model.

1. Map the Organizational Landscape	2. Identify Decision-Makers	3. Implement Strategies	4. Evaluate Strategies
Understand decision-maker structures, opportunities, and profiles.	Identify the individuals with influence control throughout their career and their decision criteria.	Deploy influence and positioning strategies with the goal of influencing decision-makers.	Make judgments about competence in implementing strategies and the contingency of those strategies.

Source: Free translation by King (2001).

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The model (Chart 2) was created to help mature professionals – with professional experience – in the self-management of their careers. Preferences regarding one's own career should also be considered (KING, 2001) since, "as individuals perceive themselves and add knowledge about their career preferences, they become capable of making more conscious choices" (TREVISAN et al., 2016, p. 76).

CAREER ENVIRONMENT AND ITS INFLUENCES ON THE SELF-MANAGEMENT PROCESS

Changes in the organizational context, especially those linked to the technological revolution and connectivity, have been occurring dynamically, transforming production processes and service delivery in all sectors of the economy (SCHWAB, 2016; KOST et al., 2019), dramatically impacting the way organizations are managed, from the standpoint of their material and human resources. Thus, "the question for all companies, without exception, is no longer whether 'there will be disruption in my company' but when the disruption will occur, how long it will take, and how it will affect me and my organization" (SCHWAB, 2016, p. 21). Remote work, work mediated through digital platforms, and flexible working hours are some examples of these changes.

Seeking to analyze how susceptible current jobs are to technological development, researchers examined 702 occupations (FREY; OSBORNE, 2017) and came up with the estimate that 47% of the total number of jobs in the United States are in the category of high-risk of computerization in a decade or two.

Entering the digital paradigm requires immediate planning and action, and for the transition to happen, professionals and organizations must understand that digital transformation is not only about technology – it is also about strategy and new ways of thinking (ROGERS, 2017). Although Brazilian companies are at a very early stage in adopting the most advanced technologies (KUPFER, 2018), there are no more "borders" for automation since, regardless of the degree of complexity of the task performed, it will be increasingly difficult to "run away from technology" (TREVISAN et al., 2016).

Such changes – planned or unplanned – tend to affect individual roles, rules, and interpretations of the world, feeding a dynamic current and shaping the emerging context of power and influence. The ebb and flow of power relations can be

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destabilized by change, and this means that dexterity in the use of political skills exhibited on one occasion may not be transferable to other configurations brought about by change, making political skills an inherently situational, dynamic, potentially unstable, and continuously useful factor (PETTIGREW; MCNULTY, 1995; WAGGONER, 2020).

As correlated terms, autonomy, proactivity, and protagonism tend to reflect individual responsibility in the process of career self-management. However, one cannot deny the existence of interdependence between individual efforts undertaken in a career and the influences of the social and organizational context, especially those in which there are recurrent changes.

Given the interdependence between the career self-management process and the environment where careers take place, people must be able to employ their creative and social potential to find their way into new occupations mediated, or not, by technology use (FREY; OSBORNE, 2017; KOST et al., 2019), so that they become socially and economically useful and can continue to experience a sense of self-fulfillment from an individual perspective.

Although the transition process between a new and old career can be a period of agony, given the insecurity and uncertainty common in the process of change (IBARRA, 2003), proactive coping is a factor that can contribute significantly to the career self-management process (SLEBARSKA; FLAKUS, 2020).

Survey Methodology

This research used qualitative content analysis of interviews, seeking to deepen the understanding of a social group by emphasizing the particularities of the phenomenon studied and its meaning for this group. To begin this study, approval was obtained from the Ethics and Research Committee of PUC-SP. The pre-test of the interview allowed adjustments to be made to the script.

SAMPLE PARTICIPANTS AND DATA COLLECTION

The sample in this research were students of lato sensu and stricto sensu postgraduate courses at universities located in the city of São Paulo. In addition

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to the educational level, a minimum of six years or more of experience in the labor market was established as an indicator of a certain degree of professional experience (Chart 3). Postgraduate students were chosen due to the fact that they have some maturation time in the labor market – unlike undergraduate students who usually have no professional experience yet – and for being in search of self-development to respond to the demands of a constantly changing labor market, in addition to increasing their interpersonal relationship network, which can contribute to the advancement of their professional career (SCALABRIN; KISHORE; CASADO, 2010).

Chart 3 Profile of the interviewees.

Interviewee	Selection criteria	Gender	Age	Hierarchical position	Post-graduation	Type of interview	Length of experience (years)	Interview duration (in minutes)
E01	Survey	F	28	Management	Lato-sensu	In person	6 to 10	18:35
E02	Survey	F	26	Management	Lato-sensu	In person	6 to 10	19:16
E03	Survey	M	30	Consultant	Lato-sensu	In person	+ 15	30:51
E04	Survey	F	53	Consultant	Lato-sensu	In person	+ 15	55:54
E05	Convenience	F	46	Coordination	Stricto-sensu	In person	+ 15	19:08
E06	Convenience	M	25	Operation (Analyst)	Lato-sensu	In person	6 to 10	16:57
E07	Convenience	M	28	Consultant	Lato-sensu	*Per Skype*	6 to 10	45:14
E08	Convenience	F	29	Operation (Analyst)	Lato-sensu	*Per Skype*	6 to 10	17:53
E09	Convenience	M	32	Other (Faculty)	Stricto-sensu	In person	+ 15	68:00
E10	Convenience	F	30	Operation (Analyst)	Lato-sensu	*Per Skype*	11 to 15	21:40

Source: Prepared by the authors based on survey data.

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Data collection was carried out through personal and virtual interviews. The interviewees were chosen by lot and convenience between the authors' schedules and the interviewees. Therefore, some of them were conducted in person and others by Skype. The semi-directive questions were answered and elaborated upon according to the specific objectives of this research. The interview questions were built from the creation of an interview protocol based on theoretical reference research. All the interviews were audio recorded with the interviewees' authorization, transcribed verbatim, and then sent to the participants for validation. The letter "I" was associated with a number from 01 to 10 to designate the interviewees (Chart 3).

ANALYSIS INSTRUMENT AND PROCEDURE

To treat the data obtained in the interviews, content analysis was performed (BARDIN, 2016) with the help of the ATLAS.ti version 7 software. The use of coding, the creation of an interview protocol, and attention to the analysis categories and interconnections presented in the interviewees' reports were fundamental in the search to achieve scientific rigor (MINAYO, 2017).

Results Analysis

This section describes and analyzes the results in light of the theoretical framework, keeping in mind the general and specific objectives.

CONCEPTUAL CATEGORIES

To perform the interpretation of the collected data, the coding technique was used, seeking to identify the existence of a relationship between the interview data and the researched theory (BARDIN, 2016). The coding resulted in 34 codes that were divided into nine conceptual categories, which are described below with the acronyms assigned to them, namely: "TC - Career Types," "EPC – Stages of the Career Planning Process," "CK – King's Model of Career Guidance," "CI – Smart Careers," "FP – Sources of Power," "AP – Organizational Political Arena," "HP – Political Skills," "4D – Four Dimensions of Political Skills," and "AC – Career Environment."

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The test "Codes-Primary Documents Table" identified a total of 568 occurrences among the ten interviews (Table 4).

Chart 4 Frequency of citation by code.

n.	Codes	Total	n.	Codes	Total
1º	4D_Social Astuteness	56	18º	FP_Relationship power	13
2º	AP_Predominance of conflict	50	19º	CI_Know how	12
3º	HP_Predictor of career success	44	20º	HP_Ability to settle conflicts	12
4º	4D_Interpersonal influence	33	21º	4D_Apparent sincerity	11
5º	4D_Networking skills	31	22º	CI_Know who	11
6º	EPC_Self knowledge	24	23º	FP_Personal power	11
7º	AP_Personal interests	23	24º	CK_Identifying decision makers	10
8º	CK_Mapping organizational landscape	22	25º	TC_Non-traditional career	9
9º	EPC_Career Strategies	19	26º	EPC_Following through on the plan	8
10º	CK_Implementing strategies	17	27º	CI_Know why	8
11º	HP_Ability to understand and influence	17	28º	FP_Task power	8
12º	EPC_Career goals	16	29º	AC_Professional role transition	8
13º	FP_Power of Position	16	30º	EPC_Action plan	7
14º	EPC_Market knowledge	16	31º	AC_Reskilling	5
15º	AC_VUCA World	15	32º	AC_Technological Revolution	4
16º	CK_Assessing strategies	14	33º	FP_Money power	3
17º	FP_Knowledge power	13	34º	HP_Predictor of management success	2

Source: Prepared by the authors based on survey data.

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The acronyms of the codes appear in the tables and figures of this research, but during the discussion, the acronyms will be omitted to favor the fluidity of the reading of the text.

CONCEPTUAL CATEGORIES APPLIED TO THE INTERVIEWEES' DISCOURSE

The most frequently applied codes were "social astuteness" (56), which is one of the dimensions of political skills, and "conflict dominance" (50), indicating respondents' concern with understanding social interactions, trying to analyze their own and others' behaviors, and identifying and trying to avoid possible conflicts (FERRIS et al., 2005).

> "So you move the radar, you have some perception, because sometimes you talk to the person for five minutes; you don't want to strengthen a friendship or anything; you want to understand how important that person is, how much that person can hurt you or, I don't know, influence you in your position; and if you identify that, you can get closer to the person" (E3).

The code "social astuteness" (56), associated with political ability as a "predictor of career success" (44) may indicate interviewees' concern with identifying and developing contact with individuals in positions of power or influence, or with access to information or opportunities that may benefit their own career (KING, 2001). The association between the codes "conflict predominance" (56) and "personal interests" (23) indicates the interviewees' perception of the configuration of a political arena in the workplace (MINTZBERG, 1985).

> "Every rational decision has an emotional background behind it. It is rational from our point of view because it is very difficult to make a rational decision when you are purely methodical, even if it harms you and you decide to take it. It is very strange to think of a professional who is going to put himself in the firing line at that level, aware that the consequences of the most rational decision are just bad for him, from a survival point of view; so, if we have a more biological approach and everything else, more animalistic, it is illogical for you to do something that will harm yourself". (E9).

The interviewees identified the configuration of the political arena based on the existence of disputes between personal and professional interests as one of the

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variables that can influence the career self-management process in both traditional and non-traditional careers.

> "It has already happened to me like this: I had a plan like, ah, for instance, I'm going to enter this company; I did all the planning, and then I faced a supervisor who did not like me and she had ways of harming me (...). She did several maneuvers (...), and in a larger cutoff in the company, my name was the first one there" (E1).
> "As a freelancer (...), it is important to read the client for career management because this ego game is what makes this client refer you to other people many times" (I7).

These results contribute to answering one of the specific aims of this research: "to assess whether the inclusion of political competence in the agenda of discussions about career self-management depends on the hierarchical level". The fact that the professionals themselves – seven of them without a management position and three with a management position – recognize politics incorporated into daily activities at all hierarchical levels, crossing all decision spheres (LAWLER; BACHARACH 1983), highlights the importance of political competence in career self-management processes.

> "There is a lot of conflict, a lot of conflict. There are a lot of little conflicts that you say: I'm dealing with preschoolers; it's crazy; the company is a preschool; people fight because of a little red spoon" (E4).

The high frequency of the code "predictor of career success" (44) contributes to answering the specific objective "to verify the importance of including political competence in career self-management programs". This result indicates that respondents recognize that the exercise of political competence can contribute to the achievement of better job outcomes, such as productivity, reputation, and salary increase (MUNYON et al., 2014; FERRIS et al., 2005).

> "Everybody had a coworker that nobody liked and never got promoted because he was a pain in the neck; he talked back to everyone in a rude way; he did his job because "this is just my obligation." So, the person stays there, does not evolve (...); so, you need this political ability to eventually get promoted or sometimes to keep a position (...) for those who are in higher positions and want to reach these higher positions" (E1).

As dimensions of political skills, "interpersonal influence" (33) and "networking skills" (31) were also among the most frequently identified codes. This result may

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reflect the interviewees' concern about exercising political skills in their daily work, considering that politics represents one, among several systems of influence at work (MINTZBERG, 1985).

> "If you don't get people who can be your partners and keep a close bond, you are in trouble because when you need something from your partner, you won't have a partner, dear. You don't have one". (E4).

"Self-awareness" (24) also had a high frequency of application. Since career decisions can be facilitated and are more valid if individuals clearly understand their motives, skills, and values (TREVISAN et al., 2016), the desire to achieve a high level of self-awareness can help an individual better adapt to opportunities.

> "I think one of my strengths is my relationship skills, as I don't have major crises within the work environment" (E7).

Among the codes in the conceptual category "career environment," the "VUCA world" (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) had the highest frequency of application (15). This indicates that respondents recognize that changes, planned or unplanned, tend to affect individual roles, rules, and interpretations of the world, feeding a dynamic current and shaping the emerging context of power and ability to influence (PETTIGREW; MCNULTY, 1995, WAGGONER, 2020).

> "But I think, like, if you don't go after it, like, it's changing, I'm lost, I'm falling behind, I'm hurting myself; if the person uses it for good to bring influential people who can teach them or help them solve a problem, that specific problem, and move on, it's okay! I think it has a good and super positive factor; it contributes a lot" (E3).

INTERRELATION BETWEEN DIFFERENT CODES AND CONCEPTUAL CATEGORIES

To verify the relationships between the codes assigned to the interview excerpts, the "Co-occurrence Table" analysis (Chart 5) was performed in ATLAS.ti. During the co-occurrence analysis, a number between 0 and 1 is generated. The higher this number, the stronger the relationship between the codes (FRIESE, 2019).

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Chart 5 Main co-occurrences between the codes.

Code	Corresponding Code	Co-occurrence
4D_Networking skills	4D_Interpersonal influence	0,33
CI_Knows how	CI_Knows why	0,33
CI_Knows who	CI_Knows how	0,28

Fonte: Elaborado pelos autores com base nos dados da pesquisa.

Among the codes that obtained the highest value, two of them are part of the "political skills" constructs, which are "networking skills" (0.33) and "interpersonal influence"(0.33). The other codes are part of the "career smart" construct, namely: "know how" (0.33), "know why" (0.33), and "know who" (0.28). These results are consistent with the goals of this study as they are directly related to the central themes of the research: political competence and career self-management.
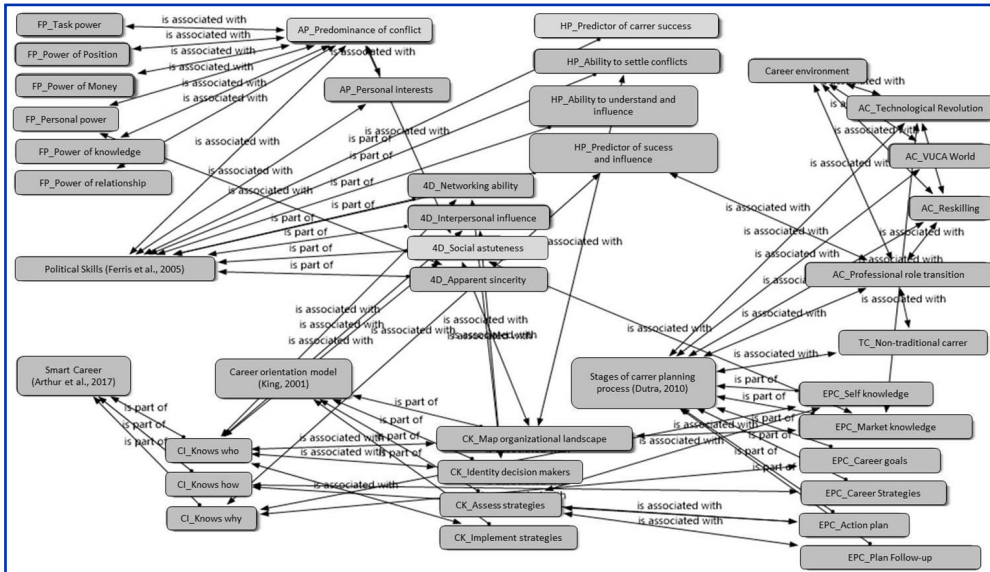
Although some interviewees demonstrated greater participation and more critical and analytical ability during the interviews, the distribution of the applied codes was homogeneous. This indicates that in general, all interviewees demonstrated awareness of the various variables – as well as their interrelationships – when reflecting on issues related to career self-management and political competence.

The codes "conflict predominance," "success predictor," and "personal interests" were the only codes applied to all respondents, an indicator of widespread perception of the configuration of the organizational political arena and that the exercise of political competence contributes to professional success.

To analyze the interrelationship between the different conceptual categories and their codes, a relationship network was created in ATLASti (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Network of relationships between categories and codes.

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Figure 1 Network of relationships between categories and codes.

Source: Prepared by the authors based on survey data.

The relationship network analysis between the codes (Figure 1) indicates the magnitude (amount of times the code was applied) and density (number of codes linked to it) (FRIESE, 2019). The magnitude can be observed from the five most applied codes, these being "social astuteness" (56), "conflict dominance" (50), "predictor of career success" (44), "interpersonal influence" (33), and "networking ability" (31). The density can be seen from the codes that were linked the most to different codes: "is part of" and "is associated with." The codes are "political skills," "stages of the career planning process," and "know who." In addition to contributing to the observation of interrelationships between conceptual categories and codes, the network of relationships also contributes to providing "clues" for the construction of new theoretical models.

KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS

The main findings of this research are related to the general and specific objectives, confirmed by the theoretical framework and the results obtained through the interview data.

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The first finding is related to the fact that these professionals can be considered individuals who generally consider themselves politically competent, although they recognize that the exercise of political competence is not always easy.

The second discovery is related to the importance of including political competence in the processes of career self-management. Given the findings of this study, the construction of alliances and networks undeniably contributes to enhancing career results. For this, the ability to deal with conflicts of interest in a way that inspires trust among peers is fundamental. In addition to contributing to the viability of professional projects, political competence can help sustain the career project over time (DUTRA, 2019).

The third finding of the research relates to the inclusion of political competence in the agenda of discussions on career self-management regardless of hierarchical level. The research data revealed that political competence is a significant construct for all professionals concerned with obtaining better career results, despite the market segment in which they work, the type of employment relationship they have, or the hierarchical level they occupy. This is because everyone faces conflicting situations in their daily lives related to disputes of personal and professional interests. Furthermore, developing and improving political competence can turn potentially negative encounters into positive encounters (FERRIS, 2019), resulting in better professional outcomes.

The fourth – and main – finding of this research was reached from the reflections of the research results as well as from the analysis between the different career planning models researched. In the process, gaps were found regarding the concept of career, offering an opportunity for the development of a new conceptual model of career self-management (Figure 2).

King's (2001) career orientation model offered the greatest comprehensiveness from the standpoint of a multidisciplinary approach to career; however, even though it refers in the body of the text to the importance of the subject knowing his or her own motivations, interests, and values, the framework presenting the theoretical model does not address these issues. The intelligent career model proposed by Khapova, Arthur, and Wilderom (2007) describes the importance of the person, their competencies, and their network of relationships, but it does not emphasize the marketing and organizational context in which the career occurs. Finally, Dutra's

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(2010) model of career planning steps ignores the importance of networking and forging alliances at work.

In building the proposed model (Figure 2), we tried to show, as much as possible, all the variables investigated in the research.

Figure 2 Phases of the career self-management model.
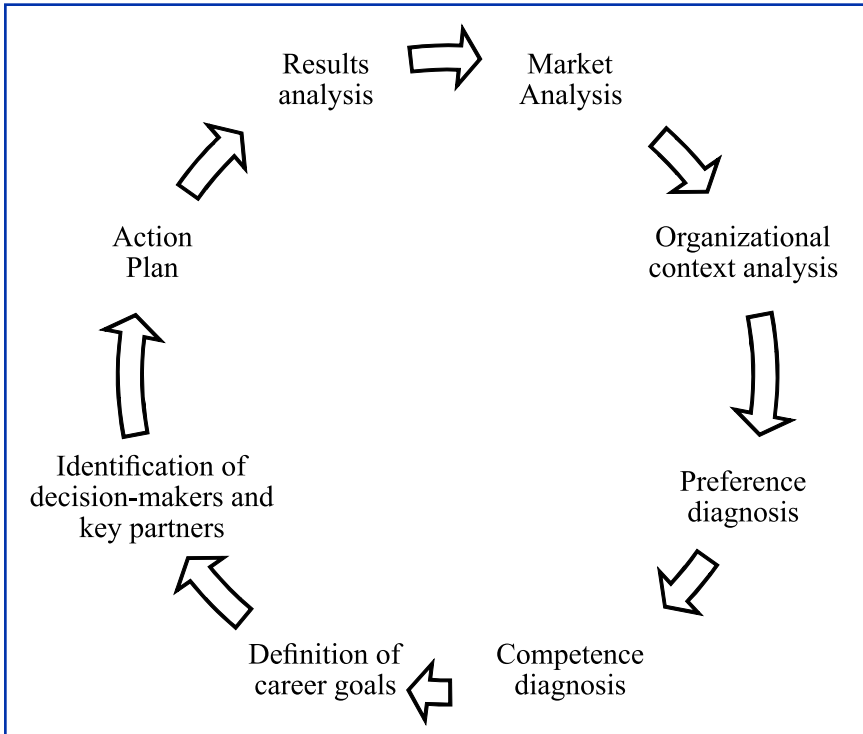
Source: Prepared by the authors based on survey data.

The several variables were named "phases" as they represent different conjunctures that involve the professional career. Arranged in a cyclical model, the phases consider the constant changes in the work context, so that career adjustments and increments are made recurrently by the professional.

The model developed as a result of this research was divided into eight phases, and its description (Chart 6) favors the understanding of each one of them during its analysis and implementation.

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Chart 6 Description of the phases of the career self-management model.

Phases	Description
1. Market Analysis	Economic scenario, main global and local trends, and the company's operating segment.
2. Organizational context analysis	Organizational structure, including people, processes, products, culture, and organizational climate.
3. Preference diagnosis	Analysis of one's own motivations, talents, and values.
4. Competences diagnosis	Updating and enhancement of technical and behavioral competencies, considering the political competence.
5. Definition of career objectives	What one intends to achieve, considering the current state, the desired state, and the individual's execution capacity.
6. Identification of decision makers and key partners	People inside and outside the organization that can favor access to opportunities, resources, and information.
7. Action Plan	Choice of strategies or actions required to achieve the predefined objectives. It should consider strategies for influencing and managing conflicts of interest.
8. Results analysis	Follow-up on the plan with continuous adjustments and increments throughout the process.

Source: Prepared by the authors based on survey data.

The application of the proposed career self-management model (Chart 6) can be favored by exchanging information and knowledge with career mentors who can be managers in the organizations – able to deal with individual development plans – or other professionals in the market, chosen in a formal or informal way.

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Final Considerations and Contributions

The need for professional requalification in the new economy involves all the professionals in the market, and given the complexity of the changes, it demands an increase in the set of individual competencies. The main changes are related to the advancement in technology, the ability to act on knowledge of a certain area, and the decentralization of the decision system. In this scenario, even if a professional has a high technical performance, the recognition of his or her effectiveness at work can be compromised by a lack of political competence. This is because, although part of the success in the process of career self-management is the result of the person's protagonism, the career occurs in the relationship with other people; therefore, the development of political competence can favor this meeting.

This research revealed that although individuals consider themselves politically competent, the exercise of political competence is not always easy, regardless of the market segment in which they work, the type of employment relationship they have with the organizations, or the hierarchical level they occupy. This result reinforces the importance of including political competence in career interventions since the work environment is full of situations involving conflicts and disputes of personal and professional interests.

This study potentially contributes to the advancement of available career knowledge as it compared, analyzed, and identified gaps between different career planning models, leading to the development of a conceptual model of career self-management that encompasses market context, organizational context, career preferences, competency gaps, career goals, decision-makers, key partners, action plans, and analysis of results.

Regarding the practical implications, it is possible to identify gains for individuals, organizations, and society. The practical benefit for individuals is related to professional success, as knowledge about how one can reach better career results increases. For organizations, the study contributes to achieving better results in negotiations between employees, clients, and suppliers, and to increasing professional satisfaction at work since, through political competence, individuals tend to be better able to transform potentially negative situations into positive ones. Since work relationships are basically social relationships, the contributions to society in-

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volve recognizing "the role of the other" in the career, thus contributing to combating individualism and indifference in relationships.

Regarding the limitations of this research, the social desirability bias – a participant's tendency to respond to an interview in a socially acceptable way – should be considered. However, it should be remembered that the inclusion of a third person in the survey, responding to the participant's behavior, would not negate the existence of perception biases.

As a recommendation for future research, considering that political competence can be developed through training, mentoring, and socialization, we suggest the creation of a field experiment that manipulates and develops political skills, addressing issues such as building alliances, networking, and the ability to deal with conflicts of interest in a way that inspires trust. The advancement of research in this area can be very useful for individuals and organizations, as these factors can contribute to enhancing career results and enabling and sustaining professional projects over time.

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