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Career Success According to New Graduates: Implications for Counseling and Management[1]

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Abstract: Qualitative research on career success has been encouraged across different category of workers. This qualitative research sought to explore how do new graduates define career success and also highlight some implications for career counseling and Human Resources management. Sample included nine new graduates from two different regions of Brazil, divided in two focus groups. Discourse analysis based on interpretative repertoire approach was used for the data analyses. The graduates' definitions emphasized both subjective (confidence in the future, career planning, professional identity construction, work adjustment, and satisfaction with the career path) and objective (work in the area of graduation with a good salary, financial independence, social recognition) career outcomes. The meanings identified in this study reinforced the multidimensional nature of the construct and also could help career counselors and human resources managers better plan their interventions contributing to new graduates' career success during university-to-work transition.

Keywords: occupational success, personnel, professional development

Sucesso na Carreira na Perspectiva de Recém-Formados: Implicações para Aconselhamento e Gestão

Resumo: Pesquisas qualitativas sobre sucesso na carreira têm sido recomendadas com o intuito de descrevê-lo na perspectiva de diferentes grupos de trabalhadores. Este estudo teve como objetivo explorar como recém-formados definem sucesso na carreira e, a partir das conceituações, apontar implicações para o aconselhamento e a gestão. A amostra incluiu nove recém-formados, de duas regiões do Brasil, subdivididos em dois grupos focais. As respostas foram analisadas por meio da análise do discurso. Os recém-formados descreveram o sucesso baseados em indicadores subjetivos (confiança no futuro, elaboração planos de carreira, construção da identidade profissional, adaptação ao trabalho e satisfação com a trajetória de carreira) e objetivos (conseguir trabalho na área de formação, independência financeira e reconhecimento social). As definições apresentadas reforçaram a natureza multidimensional do constructo e podem ser úteis para profissionais de orientação e gestores de pessoas planejarem suas intervenções, contribuindo para o sucesso dos recém-formados durante a transição para o trabalho.

Palavras-chave: sucesso profissional, recursos humanos, desenvolvimento profissional

Êxito Profesionale en la Perspectiva de los Nuevos Graduados: Implicaciones para Asesoramiento y Gestión

Resumen: Éxito en la carrera es un concepto con múltiples sentidos. Estudios cualitativos ha sido recomendados con distintos colectivos de los trabajadores. Esta investigación cualitativa buscó explorar cómo los nuevos graduados definen éxito en la carrera y también resaltar algunas implicaciones para la orientación profesional y la gestión de recursos humanos. La muestra incluyó nueve nuevos graduados de dos regiones diferentes de Brasil, divididos en dos grupos focales. Se utilizó el análisis del discurso basado en el enfoque de repertorio interpretativo para el análisis de datos. Las definiciones de los graduados hicieron hincapié tanto subjetivo (la superación de miedos e incertidumbres y construir confianza en el futuro, el progreso en metas y planeamiento de la carrera, la construcción de la identidad profesional, la adaptación al trabajo, y la satisfacción con la carrera) y objetiva (trabajo en el área de la graduación con un buen sueldo, independencia financiera, reconocimiento social). Los significados identificados en este estudio reforzaron la naturaleza multidimensional del constructo y podrían ayudar a orientadores profesionales y responsables de recursos humanos a planificar mejores intervenciones que contribuyen al éxito en la carrera de nuevos graduados.

Palavras clave: exito profesional, personal, desarrollo profesional

With the transition to a global and post-industrial society, the structure of the world of work has changed significantly, and as a result, the scenarios where careers are built up became more complex and dynamic (Lent, 2013; Schlesinger & Daley, 2016). In this arena, qualifications inherent to the human capital, such as one's educational background, starts to be central to career construction, and attainment of a college degree as a characteristic has turned

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out more valued than was before (Robinson, Murrells, & Clinton, 2006).

Coupled with these changes, every year millions of graduates worldwide complete their studies and launch their careers. Reports from graduate employers and labour market projections indicate an increase in and diverse supply of graduates in the future (Carroll & Tani, 2013; Greenleaf, 2014; Larson & Bell, 2013; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OCDE], 2012).

Moreover, the growing supply of educated workers in the labor market may contribute to graduates' failure to integrate into the workforce (Graham, Shier, & Eisenstat, 2014; Greenleaf, 2014). This difficulty can become a major problem for individuals and organizations. For individuals, it can negatively affect one's psychological well-being, personal identity, and further career success (Dietrich, Jokisaari, & Nurmi, 2012; Koen, Klehe, & Van Vianen 2012). For organizations, it can imply in high turnover rates amongst graduates that will almost certainly lead to an increase in the financial costs associated with rehiring and retraining of new workers (Larson & Bell, 2013).

For all these reasons, the first years out of college has become a major challenge for organizations, higher education institutions and career counselors. This actors are invited to dedicate time, effort and resources to better understand the particularities of this group in order create policies and practices to integrate them to the workforce, and also to generate theories of career development in early adulthood (Calmand, Giret, & Guégnard, 2014; McCracken, Currie, & Harrison, 2016; Murphy, Blustein, Bohlig, & Platt, 2010).

In view of what has been exposed, early career success during university-to-work transition has become an important issue in career counseling and human resources management. Thus, these social circumstances highlight the need to more deeply study early career success according to new graduates.

Career Success Background

Career success has been traditionally defined as the sum of externally verified or internally perceived positive job-related and psychological outcomes derived from one's work experiences (Arthur, Khapova, & Wilderom, 2005). Following such a traditional definition, career success can be divided in objective and subjective dimensions. On the one hand, objective career success can be directly observable and verifiable, being related to the society's evaluation of achievement based on extrinsic desirable features such as income, career promotions and occupational status. On the other hand, subjective success relies on personal evaluations of success, includes perceptions of intrinsic and extrinsic career outcomes and it is usually assessed by 'career satisfaction' or general affect-based measures (Dries, 2011; Ng & Feldman, 2014).

Despite the general consensus on these aspects, a number of career theories suggest that for many people career success goes beyond the aforementioned traditional definition (Dries, 2011; Santos, 2016). Career success is not as a static or general concept, but rather a social construction derived from the dynamics between the individuals' values, choices and expectations and the structural and contextual forces (Dries, Pepermans, & Carlier, 2008; Shockley, Ureksoy, Rodopman, Poteat, & Dullaghan, 2016). In addition, as people age and engage in different life experiences, they can change their perceptions and descriptions of career success (Santos, 2016).

Individuals' career expectations and anticipated career success have been changing in post-industrial and post-modern society, whereby it should be considered in the research on career success (Dries, 2011). Within a mutable working world, it is important for individuals to build narratives on their life experiences, career paths and perceived success instead of passively relying on social expectations and external demands (Savickas, 2012).

However, career success research has lacked to demonstrate new possibilities to define success and the factors underlying them. Qualitative studies have been called for, to understand individuals' perceptions on career success and to enrich the scientific knowledge on its factors (Dries et al., 2008; Shockley et al., 2016).

Following this call, some qualitative studies have been conducted, thus allowing individuals to define career success in their own words. For example, Dyke and Murphy (2006) investigated how women and men define career success. Results suggested that gender differences exist and women tend to define career success through subjective indicators (balance and relationships) while man focus more on objective outcomes (financial rewards). Hennequin (2007) sought to understand which means to succeed in blue-collar occupations. From this sample, career success was described through multiple indicators such as job satisfaction, interpersonal relationship, career satisfaction, monetary rewards, promotions, hierarchical progress, social status and recognition.

Recently, Zhou, Sun, Guan, Li, and Pan (2013) interviewed Chinese employees in order to construct a contextualized model. In this study career success was structured in three dimensions: intrinsic fulfillment, external compensation and work-life balance. Poon, Briscoe, Abdul-Ghani, and Jones (2015) explored career success meanings according to workers in nursery, blue-collar, and business occupations. Results showed that both objective and subjective outcomes were used to define the construct, however, material-based achievement emerged as a most common definition of career success. Shen et al. (2015) investigated career success across eleven countries. In this study were gathered samples from business, health care and manual workers. Results indicated that individuals percieved career success from a broader range of dimensions that vary from achieviment, work-life balance, social environment, recognition, security and survival. Altought the study suggested a multiplicity of meanings, financial achieviment was the most common indicator used to describe career success across countries. Ultimately, Shockley et al. (2016) interviewed full-time employees about their perceptions of career success. Results reinforced that career success is a

multidimensional construct that could be described through indicators such as authenticity, growth, development, influence, meaningful work, personal life, quality work, recognition and satisfaction.

Although these studies contributed to expand the career success literature, they still focus on criteria reflecting the success for full-time employees working in business, health care or blue collar occupations. Because the world of work is becoming increasingly complex and diverse, it is important to broaden the scope of the research on career success. For example, it would be important to investigate the meanings assigned to career success with various groups of workers at different stages in their careers (Dries et al., 2008; Shen et al., 2015).

Among these groups and taking the current number of people completing undergraduate studies and launching their careers into account, new graduates constitute an important and unique category of workers. However, qualitative research exploring the perceptions of career success for this group is lacking.

Early career success during university-to-work transition is usually understood as finding a job that suits one's educational area and career goals as well as adapting to the new worker role (Wendlandt & Rochlen, 2008). However, this understanding of early career success is limited, as young professionals currently face a variety of tasks and challenges during the university-to-work transition. To be successful in this transition, individuals need to learn more about the job, understand the organizational culture and rules, grow as a specialist, develop teamwork skills and identify their long-term goals. They also need to improve social-emotional competencies, such as support, autonomy and confidence (Russell, 2005).

Moreover, previous studies revealed that new graduates' views and expectations about careers and success are diverse. While some still expected a traditional graduate career with hierarchical progression within one organization, others considered that this either might not be satisfying or was unlikely to be achieved immediately (Robinson et al., 2006).

Therefore, given the variety of career paths and challenges after graduation, there is a call for more qualitative research to explore the way new graduates think about career success. Gaps in the Human Resources (HR) management and career counseling literature exist and leave practitioners in both fields unsure of how to address interventions directed to graduates in transition to work (Larson & Bell, 2013). With this in mind, our study was designed and sought to explore how do new graduates define career success, and also highlight some implications for career counseling and HR management.

Method

This qualitative-exploratory study was informed by discourse analysis theory (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell & Potter, 1988). This framework was useful to understand career success as a cultural, historical, social-linguistic and contextual.

Participants

The final sample included nine new graduates from two different regions of Brazil, divided in two focus groups of four and five participants. Group 1 included four women from São Paulo state. Three women described themselves as Caucasian and one as Black. Their age range from 23 to 27 years old (M = 24.7). Amongst the participants, one of them has graduated from private and three from public universities. With regard to education degree two graduated in Psychology, one in Education, and one in Nutrition. None of them exchange courses during graduation and all participants graduated on schedule. Three participants graduated 12 months before the interview and another one 24 months before. Two of them were not employed but were engaged in extend education in the same graduation field. The other two women transited to a full-time job in their area of graduation, and were also engaged in extra training tied to their graduation field.

Group 2 included five participants from Mato Grosso do Sul state. This group included two women and three men aged 24 to 40 years old (M = 28.0). Four participants described themselves as Caucasian and one as Black. All participants from this group have graduated from public universities. In relation to education degree two participants graduated in Law, two in Psychology and one in Mathematics. Also, none of them exchange courses during graduation and all participants graduated on schedule. Two of these participants graduated 12 months before the interview and three 24 months before. All participants transited to a full-time job. Four participants were working in their area of graduation, whereas another one was working in a different area but held a stable job aligned with career aspirations. Three participants were also engaged in extend education in the same field than that of their undergraduate studies.

Instruments

The focus group interview was outlined in a semi-structured format. Following such a format, both the participants and the researcher were flexible to more deeply cover questions they understood as more relevant and to introduce new themes. The main questions were the same for both groups and divided in three sections. The first section focused on the participant's life history and aspirations (*Who are you and what do you expect to achieve in your career?*). The second section included questions aimed at triggering the new graduates' perceptions and descriptions of career success during the university-to-work transition (*What is the first idea that comes to your mind when you think about the university-to-work transition?; What is expected from the new graduate during this transition?, What do you think about career success after graduating*). The last section of the interview intended to operationalize indicators of career

success (*When we look to a new graduate's career, how do we know that it is successful?, "What indicators can be considered?, A successful new graduate is one that...*).

Procedure

Data collection. Participants were recruited from the research team's personal networks. Initially, seven new graduates from São Paulo state and eight from Mato Grosso do Sul of both sexes and from different backgrounds were invited to participate in the study. Selection relied on three criteria: (a) create groups of participants from different backgrounds and academic courses, (b) include participants who finished graduation no longer than 24 months, and (c) include participants who may differently experience the university-to-work transition (e.g., look for employment or being employed, look for or engage in extended education). Participation was voluntary and the interviews were kept confidential. Each group interview lasted about 60 to 90 minutes and was audiotaped.

Data analysis. Discourse analysis based on interpretative repertoires approach was used to data analyses (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell & Potter, 1988). This England framework states that discourse analysis is more than categorizing, it involves creating hypotheses about the purpose and consequences of the language in use. Additionally, interpretative repertoires are units of language expressed by a set of terms, descriptions, common places and figures of speech that are organized around metaphors or images used in everyday communications that demarcate the possibilities of meanings constructions. During interpretation process, the researcher identifies the standards contained in the language and creates blocks (coding) that clarify the consensus and the variations present in the discourse. Interpretative repertoires are, in turn, summaries of these interpretations.

The group interviews were conducted and qualitatively analyzed in Portuguese. Examples of participant's expressions during the interviews were translated to English for the purposes of this paper only. The analysis process started with two group interviews being transcribed in a verbatim table. The interviews' transcriptions were independently analyzed by two judges (i.e., the first and fourth authors) within and cross-groups. At the time of this study, one of the judges was an assistant professor in Vocational Psychology engaged in doctoral studies, whereas the other one was a research grant holder.

The coding process started with a synthesis of each participant's speech. This starting procedure enabled researchers to understand the dynamics of the discursive exchanges and to get an overview of the discussed topics. Discourse analysis was then conducted. Unlike content analysis in which one creates categories based on their frequency, discourse analysis reduces the complexity of speech to manageable pieces, independently of their frequency. Based on Potter and Wetherell (1987) approach, interpretations of the language standards were made. Blocks of interpretation, labeled "interpretative repertories", were created. The interpretative repertoires enabled the identification of the consensus and variations within the participants' discourse.

After these within-case analyses, cross-case analyses were conducted to examine whether similar or different themes emerged in both groups. The analyses performed by the two judges were compared. Having completed the within- and cross-case analyses, the original transcripts of each group were re-examined to ensure that the emerging conceptual model was consistent with the participants' speeches. Finally, to validate the results, a tenured professor doctorate in Psychology and expert in Vocational Psychology (i.e., the second author) served as an auditor. The auditor verified the fit between the interpretative repertories and the implications for counseling and management, presenting adjustments whenever needed.

Ethical Considerations

This study was approved by the Ethics Committee at Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul (Case n. 2116/2011, CAAE n.0174.0.049.049-11). Individuals who met the inclusion criteria were invited to participate in the study. Those who agreed to collaborate were asked to sign in an informed consent form before data collection started.

Results

The main purpose of this study was to explore how do new graduates define career success and highlight some implications for counseling and management. Participants described early career success based on two major perspectives: subjective career success, which was associated with subjective achievements; and objective career success, which was constrained by social expectations. This was noticeable in a participant's phrasing: "*Perhaps we can define success in two ways (...). The success seen from the company's [or the society's] perspective and the success seen from the individual's perspective*". In general, new graduates define career success as including both intrinsic/subjective and extrinsic/objective dimensions.

Besides these dimensions, discourse analyses also afforded the possibility to identify eight repertoires yielding a more detailed understanding on how do new graduates think about career success. The meanings and implications for counseling and management inherent to each repertoire are next described.

Overcoming Fears and Uncertainties and build Confidence in the Future

This repertoire pointed out the new graduates' fears while facing the uncertainties at the beginning of a new career stage. For example, the fear of not being able to enter in the labor market or to fail to accomplish what were planned for, after graduation. In addition, there were doubts on technical

competences. The new graduates commonly thought they had insufficient knowledge and would not be able to practically apply what they learned during graduation. Expressions such as "*fear", "anxiety", "uncertainty", "hopeless dread", "finished college, but what and now?"* and *"will I get it*?" reflected this repertoire.

Career success could be understood as the overcoming of fears and anxieties and the increase of confidence in the future, thus enabling the construction of positive future career expectations. Taking the authorship for one's career path, dealing with uncertainty, and developing a sense of confidence and optimism toward the future were presented as indicators of early career success according to new graduates.

In this repertoire, participants highlighted the need to build confidence on their own ability. Thus, career counseling and management practices should fostering new graduate's positive expectations to their future in order to motivate their coping behaviors that seem to usually be harmed in early career life.

Goal Progress and Career Plans

Goal progress and career plans emerged in the participants' speeches as a strategy to calm down and guide them in their new career stage. Participants suggested the importance of constructing a career plan and setting goals. During the university-to-work transition, career plans seem to serve as anticipations of the future, offering direction to individuals' vocational behavior after college, preventing them from losing focus, and helping them to acknowledge short-term accomplishments that will help them to achieve major long-term goals. Expressions such as "*targets", "career plan", "not to shoot in any direction*", and "*is a first step already completed*" were used by new graduates to define career success.

In this repertoire, the new graduates perceived themselves as authors of their careers. Career plans constituted an element of short and long term goals and served the reduction of their anxieties and requests for immediate results. Social support and the ability to reassess career plans whenever needed were also mentioned in this repertoire. Participants acknowledged the role of social support in the achievement of their goals and the overcoming of difficulties.

The descriptions characterizing this repertoire offered evidences that suggest the importance of mentoring practices in counseling and management interventions. Mentoring strategies may serve as a source of encouragement, guidance, and anxiety management. Also, it may be useful to help new graduates to revise and update career plans, moving from the reflection of what is important in life to create opportunities.

Professional Identity Construction

Professional identity construction was used to describe the need to build and take on a new role in society. After graduation, the student identity could no longer guide the new graduates' behavior. Any career actions approaching the new graduates to the world of work, even if voluntary, seemed to contribute to the establishment of a new sense of professional identity. Some expressions that illustrate this repertoire were "*you are a student, and then suddenly you are not a student", "you had a social role, right? We were students then, but now we won't study or do anything and we have to look for a job", "I went from being a student to being unemployed in a matter of hours", "suddenly you are by yourself", "I'll work for free*", and "*when someone asks, what are you doing?".*

New graduates indicated that having finished college left them as people without a social identity. The routine and the social roles changed significantly, "*within hours*". It also seemed that there was no college preparation to deal with these changes afterwards. Feeling like a professional who is able to experiment and put into practice the knowledge acquired during education emerged, in the view of these new graduates, as an indicator of career success.

Looking at the descriptions of career success presented in this repertoire, it is noticeable that new graduates pinpoint challenges to the construction of a professional identity after graduation. This process seems to be informed by feeling more like a professional than a student and experiment practical activities. In this context, college traineeships, out-class activities and mentoring programs may be a useful strategy to fostering professional identity.

Work Adjustment

The work adjustment repertoire alluded to the challenges that the new graduates face when they enter the world of work, needing to fit in an organizational culture and respond to work requirements. The new graduates' speeches indicated insecurity related to technical skills in early career life. Examples of expressions illustrating these perspectives are "*you're fully adapted to your work", "learn to do a lot", "challenges that will come up and you have no idea what they are", "you will be tested*", and "*you are your competence, as much as your skill.*"

Descriptions in this repertoire suggested that the university-to-work transition is a process that unfolds over time. One of the major steps in this career stage is to find a job, preferably in the same field of education. However, success seems not to be achieved by getting a job only. To feel successful at the university-to-work transition, one also needs to feel integrated and comfortable in the profession as well as to meet the demands of work. For new graduates to be successful in early career, the adaptation to an organizational culture and work requirements is also relevant. Thus, career counselors at college and HR management should developed programs, such as internship and socialization, to foster new graduates future work adaptation.

Satisfaction with the Career Path

The satisfaction with the career path repertoire described career success as a positive evaluation of work experience after graduation and until the achievement of major goals.

Career success was herein described as the opportunities to do what one loves and being able to enter and progress in the labor market. Expressions such as "*do what you like", "satisfaction in what I'm doing", "how will you progress in that career?*" and "*a step of exactly what you want*" illustrate the descriptions of participants. The satisfaction with the career path, even if it was still under construction, brought a sense of success at this career stage.

In this repertoire, the new graduates did not describe career success as a static event happening at a specific time point, but rather as a gradually built trajectory based on a sequence of steps. It was acknowledged that from the planning stage to the achievement stage, there are a number of challenges that need to be overcome. Career success described as the satisfaction with the career path credits subjective perspectives of what is being achieved rather than the objective aspects. Career counselors and managers, throughout guidance and mentoring programs, may help new graduates expand traditional views of career success and feel satisfied with short-term achievements.

Work in the Area of Graduation with a Good Salary

Career success was also described in terms of adherence to social expectations. Participants emphasized that society pressures them to quickly get a job in the area of graduation with a good salary.

Although other perspectives on career success have been presented by the participants, when they were asked to mention observable indicators of career success, most of the responses focused on getting a job in the area of graduation with a good salary. Expressions such as "*employment", "work in the area*", and "*reasonable remuneration*" were used to describe career success.

In this repertoire, participants reproduced the traditional discourse based on objective and socially recognized indicators of career success. Getting a job in the area of graduation with a good salary seemed to serve as socially desirable result to evaluate career success. The use this perception to evaluate early career success without considering the particularities and peculiarities of one's career plans and the socioeconomic context may place the new graduates at risk for frustration. Not all new graduates planned to work in the area of graduation or to enter the labor market immediately after graduation, and for some new graduates, their plans did not always run as expected.

This repertoire illustrates the need of career counseling and management practices provide information to help graduates formulate accurate perceptions about world of work and career opportunities during university-to work transition.

Financial Independence

The financial independence repertoire described early career success as financial gains derived from the performance of a profession that provides a livelihood and affords the possibility to purchase things and become independent from parents. Expressions such as "*I want to make my own money", "be independent", "get out from under my parents' wings*", and "*stand by myself*" reflect the vocabulary used by the participants.

Career success in this repertoire suggested that one of the major goals to be achieved after graduation is to sustain for oneself without depending on others. For many cases, the end of college coincides with the emergence of adulthood, in which individuals are expected to provide for a living and raise a family. These social expectations seem to increase the social pressure for financial independence.

Regarding this repertoire, it is noteworthy that financial and family independence have been occurring increasingly late in our society, especially for economically affluent people who have access to more years of schooling. Thus, when the financial independence repertoire is used to describe early career success without additional contextualized reflection, it might negatively affect the confidence of the new graduates who remain financially dependent after college. Also, this repertoire illustrates the need of career counselors and managers plan interventions to help new graduates formulate accurate expectations about world of work and labour market.

Social Recognition through Promotions and Rewards

This repertoire described career success as the recognition of a good job performance reflected in promotions and rewards. New graduates believed that the social recognition of their good job performance could lead to their promotion and, in situations of autonomous work, more clients. Expressions such as "*recognition", "indications", "job well done"*, and "*promotions*" reflected career success.

In this repertoire, the new graduates seemed dependent on social approval to be successful. Being and feeling competent seemed not enough if they were not coupled with social recognition. Traditional objective indicators of career success such as promotions, awards, and nominations were also used by the participants to describe career success during this transition. These results may provide some insights for career counselors and HR managers better plan interventions to facilitate career develop of young professionals. Once career trajectories' structure have changed significantly new graduates should understand that a career must be built according to one's life values rather than attaining social expectations.

Discussion

The worldwide expansion of higher education has led to an increasing supply and a diversity of graduates who often expect that higher education will improve their career chances and outcomes. However, in difficult economic times, such as those we are currently living in, the new graduates may struggle to enter the labor market and establish their careers (Graham et al., 2014; Greenleaf, 2014; Koen et al., 2012). In this arena, studies on career success during university-to-

work transition became a central issue in political, economic, social and educational agendas of our society.

The results from this study indicate that new graduates describe career success through multiple meanings emphasizing both objective and subjective perspectives of the construct. Subjective career success was described as a subjective assessment regarding intrinsic achievements after graduation and was related to overcoming fears and uncertainties and build confidence in the future, the commitment with goals progress and career plans, the professional identity construction, the work adjustment, and the satisfaction with the career path. On the other hand, objective career success was described based on social expectations such as getting a job in the area of graduation with a good salary, becoming financially independent, and being socially recognized for a good job performance in terms of promotions, awards, and nominations.

Comparing the results to extant models (Dyke and Murphy, 2006; Hennequin, 2007; Poon et al., 2015, Shen et al., 2015; Shockley et al., 2016; Zhou et al., 2013), our study support the definition of career success as a multidimensional construct. Aligned with previous career theories, our study indicates that career success according to new graduates' view also relies on objective indicators, such as employment, good salary, financial independence and social recognition, coupled with others, like overcoming fears and uncertainties and build confidence in the future, commitment with goal progress and career plans, professional identity construction and work adjustment and career path satisfaction, that are less tangible in nature and are specifically tied to early career stages. Overall, our results support face validity of these career success dimensions. Based on previous studies, we may conclude that there are some common meanings attributed by graduates to career success and others more specifics that prevail during the university-to-work transition.

Juxtaposing our data to career counseling and human resources management we could highlight some implications for practice. For example, career counseling at college could stimulates reflection on professional life after graduation and help people develop proactive behaviors and acquire the necessary information to create positive and realistic perspectives to stand up to the demands for workforce entry (Greenleaf, 2014; Larson & Bell, 2013).

In preparing students for transition to work, career counselors may apply narrative approaches based on postmodern perspectives (Ishikawa, Mizuno, & Amundson, 2009; Savickas, 2012). Based on this framework, career counseling could allow individuals to share narratives on themselves, the challenges they will face at the university-to-work transition, and their possible meanings of career success. By supporting this kind of activities, career counselors might help clients deconstruct dysfunctional meanings, and create strategies to promote the co-construction of more adaptive new meanings that may lead to proactive behaviors. In this direction, career literature pinpoints that individuals with high proactive behavior are more confident, have positive expectations, persevere toward goals, and easily overcome adversity (Larson & Bell, 2013; Murphy et al., 2010). All these psychological aspects improve the probability of success in career transitions and enhance the quality of employment for new graduates (Koen et al., 2012; Savickas, 2012).

Also, HR professionals can collaborate with career counselors and help new graduates transform the academic knowledge into attitudes and skills closer to the organizations' requirements and expectations, contributing to reduce the qualification mismatch between supply and demand and fostering work adaptation (Calmand et al., 2014). At the same time, with their joint action they can call employers' and organizational managers' attention to the importance of subjective aspects of individuals' career management and favor workers' career development opportunities in their organizations. Additionally, HR managers and career counselors can work to design at college in-class and out-class activities, such as problem solving scenarios or work integrated learning programs that afford students opportunities to develop professional skills and proactive behaviors in low-risk settings (Larson & Bell, 2013; Murphy et al., 2010; Rayner & Papakonstantinou, 2015).

On this topic, college and employment counseling literature suggests that successful completion of college career programs is associated with positive early career outcomes once it provide students with an extra edge in their knowledge, skillset, interpersonal skills, and attitudes. All these extras may help them secure better jobs sooner, expose them to social networks, and give them the motivation to seek out career opportunities (Rathbun-Grubb, 2016).

In the workplace, HR professionals can continue to offer support to promote new graduates' career success. From our data some insights can be articulated to help managers better plan core practices such as recruitment, development and mentoring programs. For example, in the search for new talents, recruitment practices may be knowledgeable about new graduate's aspirations in order to provide a better fit between their expectations and organizational opportunities. Regarding new graduates' aspirations, our study showed that sometimes their career success expectations, especially those related to objective indicators, like good salary or promotions, are not very realistic in short-term. Thus, some authors advocate that both career counseling at college and recruitment and selection processes should provide information to help new graduates formulate accurate perceptions about career opportunities and job content, fostering further work adaptation (Ishikawa et al., 2009; Wendlandt & Rochlen, 2008).

Likewise, new graduates' career development and mentoring programs must be designed and activities should focus on helping young professionals to develop self-management skills and also be more confident in their future, by creating plans and developing trust in themselves for dealing with their new social and professional tasks. Yet, mentoring in early career may be a useful strategy to improve personal development and fostering professional identity and work adaptation (Calmand et al., 2014; Larson & Bell, 2013; Shen et al., 2015).

A number of future directions for research can be also considered from this study. It would be relevant to replicate this study in different countries and cultures to gain a more deepen and inclusive understanding about how do new graduates think about career success during the university-to-work transition. It would be additionally important to investigate the dynamics between subjective and objective aspects of career success and their variability for genders and social-economic statuses.

As this was an exploratory study, some limitations can be signaled. First, the conduction of this study with nine participants could be considered unrepresentative to address career success. However, based on discourse analysis theory, we decided to conduct our study with a small sample size to better explore this complex psychosocial phenomenon. To reduce this limitation, two focus group were conducted and participants were selected from two different Brazilian states, which differ in their economic context. While São Paulo is characterized by technology and industries, Mato Grosso do Sul is characterized by agriculture and services.

Given the qualitative-exploratory nature of our study, it is important to mention that we do not take the meanings of career success herein presented as a unique truth of what career success means for all new graduates. Our results should be taken as illustrative of possible meanings of career success, with other meanings being possible to emerge in other cultures and with other samples. Thus, the consideration of our results for practical or research purposes needs be contextualized. Still, the contextual meanings herein described may find parallels to the ones derived from other social contexts.

Concluding, we hope this study contributes to career success literature by exploring definitions of career success according to new graduates. The knowledge about how do new graduates think about career success may help career counselors and human resources managers better plan their interventions contributing to new graduates' career success during university-to-work transition.

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