THE COMPETENT PROFESSIONAL PROFILE DEMANDED IN THE WORLD OF WORK: CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES IN THE ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT

Corina Alves Farinha[1] and Frederico Cordeiro Martins[2]

ABSTRACT

The article addresses the concept of competence and its application in organizations. The objective is to establish relationships between the understanding and application of the concept of competence in the theoretical scope and organizational practice, considering the different interpretations of the theme. The methodology includes a theoretical review on the subject, based on reference authors such as Zarifian, Fleury & Fleury, and Le Boterf, containing historical and contemporary analyses, notably in the process of recruitment and selection of workers. The research highlights the difficulties and challenges represented by the competency model, with regard to a methodology capable of analyzing the mobilization of knowledge of the worker detached from a list of specific tasks centered on the position. The perspectives refer to the proposition of competence to an approach that includes the evaluation of academic knowledge, professional experiences and individual attitudes in the organizational space. Therefore, the worker evaluated as competent in one company may not be evaluated by another, since competence is situational.

Keywords: Competence. Recruitment and Selection. Professional Profile.

[1] Masters
State University of Minas Gerais - UEMG Abaeté
[2] Doctorate
State University of Minas Gerais - UEMG Abaeté

INTRODUCTION

The concept of *competence* is polysemic, as this conception is studied by different areas of knowledge, it generates numerous biases and interpretations, both in the academic and organizational spheres. In general terms, competence encompasses three basic requirements: knowledge built throughout existence, with implications for professional life, and the worker's attitudes in the face of numerous work situations.

Since the 1980s, due to the globalization of the economy, scientific and technological development, among other elements, which have intensified competitiveness and complexity in production, which has tended to adopt a flexible model, the world of work has started to require a professional profile with certain skills to fill vacancies.

As a result of these factors, recruitment and selection services prioritize the evaluation of the individual capabilities of candidates, under the focus of competence. The interviews and group dynamics, among other techniques, aim to analyze the understanding of the work process, creativity, critical thinking, communication, autonomy and responsibility of the workers.

This context, according to Zarifian (2001), pointed to the rupture with the Taylorist procedures centered on the control of tasks, as well as the intention to evaluate workers in terms of understanding the production process and initiative, aspects that were already part of the knowledge of some workers, but were disregarded by managers. The people in charge of production at the time, according to Zarifian (2001, p.23), "aimed to assess the personal skills of each employee, regardless of the job occupied".

In view of this change, the challenge of building new references for the evaluation of workers within the scope of the recruitment and selection process is imposed, which is often outsourced and carried out by specific companies.

However, in Brazil, according to Dutra (2004), companies have revealed difficulties in understanding the concept of *competence*, due to the different ways of understanding the term and the ways in which it is articulated by those responsible for the organizations. The author observes that, in relation to the theme, discourses loaded with modernity coexist in organizations, allied to traditional postures typical of the rigid production model. In addition, the author points out "there is an understanding that it is a fad, which does not meet the needs of organizations".

The authors Fleury & Fleury (2004), based on other research, observe the tendency to use the concept of competence *by* human resources professionals as something that

can be measured and quantified. Similar to the standards and results obtained through training, competence is conceived as a set of knowledge, skills and attitudes, linked to the performance of the worker, thus referring to the task or set of tasks prescribed in a position.

The theoretical review allows us to verify, from different perspectives, the French authors Zarifian (2001, 2003, 2005), Le Boterf (2003, 2006), Dadoy (2004), Ropé & Tanguy (2002), Stroobants (2002), and the Brazilians Fleury & Fleury (2004), Dutra (2004) and Ruas (2005) are unanimous in stating that the understandings about the concept of competence are differentiated in academia and in companies. It is particularized according to characteristics such as: organizational culture, field of activity, size of the company, technology adopted and relationship established with the market, customers and workers.

Thus, the worker evaluated as competent in one company may not be so under the evaluation of another, even because the competence is situational. In view of the above, the following question arises: What is the understanding and application of the concept of competence from the perspective of scholars of the subject in the academic and organizational spheres?

COMPETENCE

Studies on the construction of the concept of *competence* began in 1980 in France and in Brazil in 1990. The current phase of these studies is limited to the dissemination and application of this concept in people management within organizations and in academia.

The theme is not a fad; on the contrary, its record is very old. According to Isambert-Jamati (2002), the word *competence* at the end of the Middle Ages was associated with legal language. Currently, the concept of *competence* goes beyond this focus, entering the field of Psychology, Education and Sociology. It basically involves three modalities of knowledge: knowledge in terms of knowledge, know-how and know-how. Competence is closely related to action, movement, and enterprise. Its recognition depends on the look of the other.

In the mid-1980s, Zarifian (2001), a French sociologist, a specialist in management, researched furniture companies that were looking for alternatives to get out of the crisis in the sector. To this end, they began to meet the specific demands of their customers, striving to improve the quality and diversification of products, adopting flexible production, with digital numerical control machines and tools. It was in this context that problems related to quality, deadlines, variety, capacity for initiative, problem solving and others came

to be seen "as qualities that workers would need to demonstrate in a break with Taylorist-Fordist procedures", stresses Zarifian (2001, p.22)-. However, such elements, the same author continues, "were already present in the workers, but [...] they were not recognized and formalized and, therefore, did not appear". Therefore, "the change is not due to a sudden discovery of the humanity of the workers, but to the perception of a change in the conditions of production in the sector" (ZARIFIAN, 2001, p.22).

Thus, *Competence* was the name given to the new form of evaluation of workers, adopted in the flexible production model to replace the categorizing and homogenizing approach of the Taylorist-Fordist model (ZARIFIAN, 2001).

Therefore, it is in this period that the trend arises to adopt the concept of competence in the process of recruitment and selection of workers. It should be noted that from this point of view, *competence* is a demand of the employer and comes from a transformation in the evaluative judgments of workers by the management and those responsible for the workers' management practices. On the other hand, it is understood as a gain for the worker to express his autonomy and initiative, of his knowledge in different situations, as opposed to the passivity requested by the Taylorist-Fordist model.

Zarifian (2001), when carrying out the State of the Art of the theme in France, built the concept of competence by combining three approaches:

> [...] Competence is the individual's taking initiative and assuming responsibility in the face of professional situations he or she faces.
>
> [...] Competence is a practical understanding of situations, which is based on acquired knowledge and transforms it, as the diversity of situations increases.
>
> [...] competence is the ability to mobilize networks of actors around the same situations, to make these actors share the implications of their actions, to assume areas of co-responsibility (ZARIFIAN, 2001, p. 68-74).

In this understanding, competence refers to the individual's specificity, originality, life trajectory, encompassing their professional experience, capacities and potentialities. In this way, schooled knowledge, know-how, experience and know-how (also called behavioral knowledge and social competence, especially in terms of behaviors and attitudes) are valued, as well as their ability to anticipate problems and not just solve them, evidencing movement, participation, mobilization (ZARIFIAN, 2001).

However, Zarifian (2001) informs that know-how is an inappropriate denomination for the focus on attitudes and behaviors generated by competence. The author explains

that know-how refers to the deep and stable personality of the individual, to his personality traits and aptitudes considered innate, which can be verified by means of personality tests. In this context, the worker is evaluated in his totality, in his "being". However, the approach that emphasizes behavior and attitudes concerns "social competence", says Zarifian (2001, p.146), because the evaluation falls "on the way an individual apprehends his environment in a situation, the way he behaves". What is sought with this approach is a partial and manifest view of the individual. Behavior is acquired and can evolve, which is why the evaluation takes place at a certain time. It is not the *being* that one seeks to apprehend, but his model of conduct, in the face of a given environment. The concept of attitude underpins the concept of behavior. Attitude translates what sustains and stabilizes behavior; it is manifested individually; it is social because it is produced in a specific socio-cultural environment and because it denotes a certain way of positioning the individual in social relations. Attitude is therefore translated into behavior.

In Brazil, Fleury & Fleury (2004, p.30) observe that competence is "[...] a responsible and recognized knowing how to act, which implies mobilizing, integrating, transferring knowledge, resources and skills that add economic value to the organization and social value to the individual". Referring to this concept of individual competence, Dutra (2004) adds that the concept should be applied to management instruments that enable people to perceive what their relationship with the organization adds to them. Thus, competence is attributed to several actors: the company has a set of competencies that are its own, resulting from the "genesis and development process of the organization and are concretized in its heritage of knowledge, which establishes the competitive advantages of the organization in the context in which it is inserted" (DUTRA, 2004, p.14). People, in turn, have a set of skills that are used or not by the organization.

However, for Dadoy (2004, p.124), employers have always valued behavioral competence related to relational knowledge (know-how-to-be):

> [...] this knowledge, in fact, has always been part of the qualities expected by employers, but this requirement seemed so natural that there was no need to make it explicit at a time when technical knowledge was still quite rare in the labor market and was, at the time, the first concern of employers (DADOY, 2004, p.124).

Dadoy (2004) observes that the personal characteristics of workers have always been the target of analysis, with a view to avoiding relationship problems and conflicts existing in the work environment, related to the worker's personality, emphasizing in a

special way the submissive behavioral model, controlled by the Taylorist-Fordist management. According to the author, at all levels of hiring, employers' demand for adaptable workers capable of inserting themselves in work groups is evidenced. She points out that in the period 1976-1978, with the French experience of "mobilization and professional insertion of unqualified young people, social knowledge appeared explicitly," suggesting that these behaviors "present more problems than technical knowledge, which has become more abundant and cheaper." On the other hand, behavioral knowledge, in the view of Dadoy (2004), is not conceived as an integral part of professional training, and is not guided by an official institution such as the school.

Le Boterf (2006) explains: competence is subjective, and, by itself, it is invisible. Thus, it is not directly accessible, so its validation depends on the concepts, the methodology used, the actors involved and the points of view adopted. Competence is always linked to the measurement mechanism that is applied to it and always depends on the look that falls on it. What is evaluated is not the competence itself, but what is called competence, through the evaluation mechanism (instruments, rules, instances). The worker, in order to be recognized as competent, is so in relation to something, and this parameter establishes a prescription, a model, a limit to be competent.

Le Boterf (2006) also clarifies that the limitation exists in the level of knowledge reached by the individual's profession, at a given time, that is, competence depends on the other's view, and therefore, competence is situational.

Tomasi's (2004) understanding of competence addresses the individual

> [...] an individual who, produced in the social relations in which he is inserted, insists on keeping his differences in relation to others [...] and this does not mean the establishment of a dualism between himself and the collective, but, unlike that, dialogue (TOMASI, 2004, p.11).

However, in the organizational sphere, Stroobants (2002) analyzes that the concept of competence refers to the modification of the worker's profile, whose vocabulary is renewed, with terms related to knowledge and competences. In turn, Ropé & Tanguy (2002) indicate that this concept is linked to a set of knowledge, qualities and skills related to the craft.

Dadoy (2004) points out that the assimilation of the concept of competence occurred in different contexts, being applied to objects different from the originals, without

employers, unions and educators in the professional area having a deeper reflection on its various definitions and uses.

COMPETENCE IN COMPANIES: THE COMPETENT WORKER

The research of Zarifian (2005) indicates that competence in the business environment is linked to the use of two types of instruments: the construction of references and the conduct of interviews with the employee by his hierarchical superior, in order to assess whether or not the professional is exercising the required competencies. The construction of references, according to the author, is done through lists of competencies centered on know-how, aiming to indicate, in a prescriptive way, what wage earners should know how to do and say in a given work situation.

However, this construction is similar to that of the Taylorist work references, centered on the prescription of tasks. In this context, the so-called competent worker will be the one who, when developing his work, has the attitudinal and behavioral competencies prescribed in the reference.

On the other hand, Le Boterf (2006) proposes that the methods of evaluating the competence of a professional applied in organizations analyze the practice that the worker uses to interpret the prescriptions of a given job. A practice does not correspond, item by item, to a prescription. If that were the case, the practice would be reduced to a simple implementation of guidelines and standards. In this sense, the target of the evaluation is not the set of competencies of the worker, since these, by themselves, are invisible, but what the evaluation mechanism designates as competencies.

However, for Stroobants (2002), the recognition of the worker's competence and capacity is given by the cognitive aspect of the work that is performed.

Le Boterf (2003) observes that the professional recognized as competent is the one who *knows how to act* competently, mobilizing resources from personal training, biography and socialization, educational training and professional experience. Competencies are produced through resources and are converted into professional activities and behaviors adapted to specific contexts. Knowing *how to act* is distinct from *know-how,* which is a set of experiences and skills.

In the research developed by Le Boterf (2003), the existence of contradictions between the official discourse of company leaders and the reality of their management was found. Although most managers consider the contribution of workers to be an important

factor for satisfactory organizational performance, many still consider material and financial factors to be preponderant. There are few investments in the implementation of policies that stimulate the development of competencies and, although many consider them a priority, only a minority harmonizes their policy with the discourse on the priority of people in the organization.

The adoption of the principles of competency-based management by company managers presupposes the recognition of an autonomous worker, in a team and in a network, and implies the development of the worker's competence *in* the organization and the development of competence *over* the organization (DUTRA, 2004).

 In this model, the simple regulation of the organization of work becomes unnecessary; the passive, submissive relationship between the worker and the company (Taylorist-Fordist management) tends to change, and the worker, as Zarifian (2001, p.138) explains, "can become an explicit actor in the evolution of the organization". Competence over organization, in turn, is gradually developed as the worker executes work projects. Zarifian (2001) notes the hesitation of company leaders to develop this competence over the organization, especially at the base of the hierarchical pyramid, in which the relationship of power, submission/control establishes the Taylorist-Fordist managerial practice.

On the other hand, Dutra (2004) points out that there are difficulties in understanding the concept of competence and in the forms of its articulation by those responsible for the companies, as discourses loaded with modernity coexist in organizations, combined with the maintenance of traditional postures, typical of the rigid production model. In such a way, the competency model is understood as inadequate to work with the needs of organizations and considered a fad. Referring to the current model of people management adopted by organizations, Fleury & Fleury (2004, p.27) conclude that "managing by a competency model implies only a bureaucratic change in the procedures for selecting individuals".

In organizations, the work to be performed has gone from control to the tendency to autonomy, requiring responsibility, commitment, initiative, communication skills and the development of the professional's critical thinking. Such characteristics, when mobilized in a work situation and evaluated by recruiters and managers, are considered competencies and the worker is said to be competent. This trend has generated changes in the process

of recruiting and selecting workers, until then centered on the principles of the position and the right person for the right position.

COMPETENCE AND THE PROCESS OF RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION OF WORKERS

The skilled profession is a central unit in the work process. Since the last decades of the twentieth century, there has been a tendency to search for workers who are not only qualified, but also competent. The qualification comprises the knowledge related to the profession, acquired in the school and organizational environment, through experience. Competence, in turn, is the mobilization of formal, informal and social knowledge, built throughout life, including individual attitudes, in the face of numerous work situations.

With the adoption of the concept of competence by the world of work both in France, Brazil, and in other countries, recruitment and selection practices have become more rigorous. One of the first aspects was the requirement of a higher level of education and for this the diplomas should attest to minimum education, that is, writing, reading and comprehension of texts, elaboration and understanding of calculations. In short, the worker's knowledge and behavioral discipline were analyzed in depth. The selectors began to compare individuals in real work situations, their effective competence in relation to the company's expectations.

On the other hand, analyzing the history of the process of recruitment and selection of workers, Villela (2008) finds the framework of a primitive model of recruitment and selection found in China, in the Han dynasty, in the year 207 B.C. The Emperor, using the premise 'divide and rule', divided the Chinese territory into provinces, managed by officials of the central power. To occupy the positions related to tasks and activities of tax collection and collection, resource administration, among others, it instituted the selection of candidates through public competition, based on merit, sponsorship and nomination, creating a long and detailed description of the function of public servant.

The call of the Chinese Emperor Wu Di provides evidence of the principles that involved those recruitment and selection practices, in a certain way, present today:

> We want heroes! Exceptional work requires exceptional men. An unruly horse can become a valuable animal. A man who is an object of hatred may later perform great works. What happens to the intractable horse is also the case with the arrogant man: it is only a matter of training. We thus order the district officials to seek out men of brilliant and exceptional talent to become our generals, our ministers and our emissaries to distant states (MORTON, 1986, p. 75).

The discourse reveals that the labor market demands, as it does today, the best workers, because the work to be done is exceptional and, for this, there is a model of worker: a hero, valuable for his docility; if not, it is a matter of training. However, according to the author, the archaeological records show that such a call and the efforts of the district officials, although establishing a method of recruitment and selection, were not enough. Signings were few and did not work as expected. For Fernandez-Araóz[3] (1999), "it is impossible to transform the process of hiring a person into a science", that is, the process of hiring people does not have an exact result, it is not configured in a systematized study. So, although a series of practices are used that seek logic and predictability in the hiring process, success remains undefined, as suggested by the 30% to 50% rate of dismissal or resignation in the hiring of executives.

If Taylor (1967) sought *"what to do"* and *"a better way"* to do the tasks, outlining the position, the personal characteristics evaluated in the process of recruitment and selection of workers configured an obedient and disciplined profile. The worker, confined to an isolated position and subject to administrative controls, rules, impositions and hierarchy, was prevented from acting as a person "holder of qualities contextualized in a work situation, such as curiosity, rigor, reactivity", as Le Boterf points out (2003, p.124).

Notably, the worker's gesture, his movements at pre-established times and tasks were required. The important thing was to recruit labor, and this *"hand"* needed *to be* executed, both on the factory floor and in the office. However, the 'hand', that is, the worker should be docile, with a profile similar to that demanded by the Chinese Emperor. To ensure efficiency, the worker would be trained, becoming a valuable 'animal', restricted to the workstation, suitable for repetitive work.

Braverman (1987), citing the principles of scientific management of Taylor [4](1967) for the scientific selection of labor, observes that it was centered on the physical condition of the worker, valuing the profile of the submissive professional (type of ox). The selection consisted of "picking one of the common types that are especially appropriate for this type of work". As for the practices of scientific selection, it is worth alluding to the inflexible rule stipulated by Taylor:

---

[3] He has more than 30 years of experience in the field of *headhunting*; he was elected by *Business Week Magazine*, on 03/25/2008, the 13th in a list of the 50 most influential talent scouts in the world. He works in a recruitment and selection service provider based in Zurich, Switzerland, founded in 1964, operating in 37 countries.
[4] TAYLOR, Frederick Winslow. The principles of scientific management. New York, 1967.

> [...] to talk and deal with one candidate at a time, since each worker has his special capacities and limitations, and since we are not dealing with men in masses, but trying to develop each individual to his highest state of efficiency and prosperity (BRAVERMAN, 1987, P.96).

Therefore, to ensure the principle of the candidate appropriate to the type of work, the interviewer resorted to the practice of individual interviews, in the evaluation of the worker's characteristics.

In recent decades, the valorization of people in the organizational sphere has emerged. In view of this, the position, a central element of the recruitment and selection process, has been undergoing changes, shifting the focus of tasks to people, prioritizing the occupant of the position, the person designated to perform it. People's incentive, motivation and ability to interact, related to their participation in decisions in the execution of tasks, are essential characteristics (TOLEDO, 1992).

In view of this, personality tests are added to the practice of individual interviews, among others that seek to unveil the candidate's intellect and personality, through the analysis of their reactions, compared to cataloged data. However, such tests have obstacles, such as time, cost and the need for psychologists to apply. A personality questionnaire was adopted, with a more simplified practice, which consists of a series of questions about practical life situations. Also the schooled knowledge and other knowledge acquired in the individual's professional trajectory are also highlighted and required aspects of the worker, through proof of specific knowledge and presentation of diplomas (ALMEIDA, 2004).

On the other hand, under a strategic focus on recruitment and selection, it seeks to reconcile business and individual interests. To this end, it seeks a participatory professional and provider of knowledge (ALBUQUERQUE, 1987). In this context, Dutra (2004) adds the concept of occupational space (set of attributions and responsibilities of a person who occupies a certain position). However, the process of recruitment and selection of workers, despite its strategic nature, maintains the principles based on the position and the right person for the position, although there is an appreciation of knowledge, experience and evaluation instruments based on interviews, tests and tests, as highlighted by Dutra (2004) and Almeida (2004).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This theoretical research showed that the referenced authors highlight the difficulties and challenges represented by the competency model because it is detached from the model of the right person for the right position, proclaimed by the Taylorist-Fordist focus of production, but from the mobilization of knowledge of the individual in a given professional situation. From the perspective of the authors studied, the different understandings of the concept of competence hinder its operationalization in most organizations, with a multiplicity of interpretations and the coexistence of modern discourses and traditional practices.

Future studies may explore, through qualitative and quantitative approaches, the perspective of specific instruments to assess competencies in different sectors and cultural contexts. It is also considered relevant to investigate how companies can integrate individual skills into organizational development, considering the dynamic changes in the labor market and the demands of digital transformation. These efforts will contribute to broadening the understanding and application of the competency-based management model in the organizational context.

REFERENCES

1. Albuquerque, L. G. de. (1987). O papel estratégico de recursos humanos (Tese de doutorado). Faculdade de Economia e Administração da Universidade de São Paulo, Departamento de Administração, São Paulo.

2. Almeida, W. (2004). Captação e seleção de talentos: repensando a teoria e a prática. Atlas.

3. Bohlouli, M., et al. (2024). Competence assessment as an expert system for human resource management: a mathematical approach. Recuperado de https://arxiv.org/abs/2001.09797. Acesso em 18 dez. 2024.

4. Braverman, H. (1987). Trabalho e capital monopolista: a degradação do trabalho no século XX. LTC.

5. Chiavenato, I. (2021). Introdução à teoria geral da administração (11ª ed.). Elsevier.

6. Chiavenato, I. (2014). Gestão de pessoas: o novo papel dos recursos humanos nas organizações (4ª ed.). Elsevier.

7. Dadoy, M. (2004). As noções de competência e competências à luz das transformações na gestão de mão de obra. In A. Tomasi (Org.), Da qualificação à competência: pensando o século XXI (pp. xx-xx). Papirus.

8. Dutra, J. S. (2004). Competências: conceitos e instrumentos para a gestão de pessoas na empresa moderna. Atlas.

9. Fleury, A., & Fleury, M. T. (2004). Montando o quebra-cabeça conceitual. In A. Fleury & M. T. Fleury (Orgs.), Estratégias empresariais formação de competências: um quebra-cabeça caleidoscópio da indústria brasileira (3ª ed., pp. xx-xx). Atlas.

10. Gil, A. C. (2017). Como elaborar projetos de pesquisa (6ª ed.). Atlas.

11. Isambert-Jamati, V. (2002). O apelo ao conceito de competência. In F. Ropé & L. Tanguy (Orgs.), Saberes e competências: o uso de tais noções na escola e na empresa (3ª ed., pp. xx-xx). Papirus.

12. Le Boterf, G. (2006). Avaliar a competência de um profissional: três dimensões a explorar. Reflexão RH Pt. Recuperado de http://www.guyleboterf-conseil.com/articlesenligne. Acesso em 12 fev. 2007.

13. Le Boterf, G. (2003). Desenvolvendo a competência dos profissionais. Artmed.

14. Lopes, M. R., Maidana, F. A., & Queiroz, A. F. (2018). Recrutamento e seleção por competência: o desafio dos recursos humanos. Revista de Ciências Gerenciais, 22(35), 54-60.

15. Marras, J. P. (2011). Administração de recursos humanos: do operacional ao estratégico (14ª ed.). Saraiva.

16. Morton, W. S. (1986). China – história e cultura. Zahar.

17. Ropé, F., & Tanguy, L. (2002). Saberes e competências: o uso de tais noções na escola e na empresa (3ª ed.). Papirus.

18. Silva, L. R. (2017). Gestão por competências: passo a passo da implementação de ferramentas no processo de recrutamento e seleção (Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso). IESCAMP.

19. Stroobants, M. (2002). A visibilidade das competências. In F. Ropé & L. Tanguy (Orgs.), Saberes e competências: o uso de tais noções na escola e na empresa (3ª ed., pp. xx-xx). Papirus.

20. Zarifian, P. (2001). Objetivo competência: por uma nova lógica. Atlas.

21. Zarifian, P. (2003). O modelo da competência: trajetória histórica, desafios atuais e propostas (E. R. R. Heneaul, Trad.). Senac.

22. Zarifian, P. (2005). Les conflits temporels et les divergences stratégicas à l'épreuve de la gestão por competências. Communication pour le congrès de l'AGRH. Recuperado de http://www.philippe.zarifian/page127. Acesso em 20 mar. 2007.