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A research and study of the perception of PMO – Project Management Office – in Brazilian Project Management Professionals, based on the theory of social representations.

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this work is to research, analyse and reveal the perception of the Project Management Professionals about the PMO – Project Management Office. This research based paper discuss the perception of the PMO in the mind of 716 project management professionals. The methodology used is the Theory of Social Representations which uses the free recall of words about PMO. The sample were chosen among participants of Project Management (PM) congresses in Brazil and experts certified in PM after closing classes of Post Graduation courses in PM. The research data can be analysed by readers of this paper in other ways, so that other questions could be explored in the future with the collected data presented in the paper. The study could find the core words such as: “planning”, “control”, “organization”, “strategy” and “results”. These words represent the concept of PMO. Other words freely recalled by the professionals indicate that the concept of PMO is well consolidated in the community of PM professionals, in Brazil. The paper shows also that the Theory of Social Representations and its free recall of words in two dimensions could be an effective tool to research in management and administration, as it is good in marketing research.

KEY WORDS:

Project Management Office. Social Representations. Research Methods

1. INTRODUCTION

In any investigation that involves questions of values and opinions is necessary to be careful not to make mistakes, in this way deceiving yourself at individual, organizational or social levels, the real knowledge can not be found from limited approaches, which do not complete, not fulfilled as a whole, this complexity is part of human nature, it is a strong characteristic in human beings.

The theory of Social Representation was formulated, from its original conception by Serge Moscovici (1961) , psychologist, who was born in Romenia, and he became naturalized french and developed his career in France, Paris, he became Diretor of Studies of École des Hautes Études in Sciences Sociales of Paris. Moscovici tried to understand and explain in his first work as the production of a large knowledge in order to contribute in the identity of the groups, making efforts to influece in their practice and building his thought. One of the main theses defended by him was : The function of representations. He wants to explain that was not necessary the reality where several individuals and groups were acting though.

The origin we can notice was in the Psychoanalysis field, the theory of social representations, and it has been utilizing in researches and as an example in the Administration area (Cavedon, 1999; Ferreira *et al*, 2005; Möller, 1996; Vergara, 2005; Vergara and Ferreira, 2004). It is important to noticing: that time the search was in fact theory and in one area with multiple sides as Administration, the theory shows itself as an interesting option for investigations.

The article is structured in four sessions, besides this introduction. The second one brings us an approach about the concept and the typical attributions of project offices, its principal base the Pmbok (2004), are brought out contributions from authors who present the PMO as an interesting option to provide the typical needs of organizations those work in management projects.

The third one is focused to the Social Representations, explaining its presuppose and the main characteristics, revealing how it can contribute for researches in the management area. It is also presented the concept of core on social representations, the importance of the use of its techinque in these researches, the narrative of these experiences.

In the fourth and last session, are presented the procedures of methodologies experienced in the research. They are in details, step by step were followed in order to conduct the social representation studied in this session. At the same time, are presented the adopted procedures as well as the results obtained in each phase of the research.

In the end, the conclusion, are developed comments on the core of the social representation here focused, establishing relations between the main expressions arosed and concepts of PMO found in Pmbok (2004). Are transmitted opinions, concepts about the characteristics of the modern organizations as well as the social representation studied in this article.

2. THE PROJECT OFFICES (MANAGEMENT OFFICES)

The project offices stands for a high tendency in the worldwide organizations, according to Morris and Jamieson (2004). They can have another initials as PO. Project Support Office (PSO) and Project Management Office – Center of Executives (PMCoE), although those different nomenclatures have the same type of action.

The PMO offers operational support to different projects in the organizations, as well as management. The PMO can act in its proper selection of projects must be priority. Besides, it supplies a relevant contribution in adopting of the strategy plan.

According to the Pmbok (2004), some of the main characteristics of PMO includes, but are not limited to:

- Shared resources and coordinated in all management projects by the PMO.
- Identification and development of the methodology to the management projects, besides the standards and the best practices.
- Effect standard linked to policies, procedures, forms (templates) and other shared documents.
- Management of configuration with focus in all projects of management by the PMO.
- Management and storage of risks as a center for all projects.
- Specific headquarters to deal with computer tools for operational and management of software, for instance a standard software of Project Manager.
- Communication Central Coordination for projects.
- Coach Plataform for Project Managers.
- Supervision Center of all cronograms and budgets of the project.
- General coordination of quality management and relationship of project manager in relation to the quality team of organization.

Another important contribution to be offered is showed by the actions of benchmarking of process and results in evidence, contributing in this way to reach high levels of maturity and a major effect in the management projects.

These are the contributions extremely importants in the current context, in fact the management project changed from an empirical practice to the international relevant recognized area, this means a change for a high knowledge. (Rad and Levin, 2003).

The first experiences in this sense and more coordinated were adopted in 2003, the large utilization of PMO was too fast and spread in the whole world. (Kendall and Rollins, 2002).

It is relevant to call the attention to the PMO support, the process of decision according to its own dynamic, adjusting with the market, joining the vision of management of projects with the current vision of administration, in terms of market leadership. For all these, there are a great expansion of project offices, according to mentioned to Valle, Soares e Silva (2008). For all reasons and the advantage of

its implementation has been accepting because of the great acceptance of PMO, it has been noticing in a favorable way by the competent professionals on management of projects. According to the showed in the introduction, make the right correlations of this perception is the objective of this article. For this purpose will be present in the next session the Theory of Social Representations, it will reveal useful in acquisition of the perception reported in this study.

3. THEORY OF SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS

The theory of social representations was written by Serge Moscovici in the end of 60's. Being spreading from its publication in 1961, on his study *L'Analyse psychosociale: Son image et son public* (MOSCOVICI, 1961) he settled with a new conception linked to integration between the phenomenon of individual perception and social. In the beginning he used psychosocial approach that has been studied, utilized in other several fields of knowledge linked to the human being.

A representation can be defined as a set of perceptive phenomena, images, opinions, belief, and attitudes. The connection with the links between these elements give us a range of meanings united to the social and psych process. So, the social representations are complex phenomena and we can understand that the sense of an object is structured by the person in the context of his/her relations, in a dynamic process of understanding and transformation into reality. The social representations are not a mirror of reality but mental constructions of objects, they do not separate from symbolic activities from the people and of their insertion in the social as a whole. (Carvalho, 2001; Farr, 2002; Madeira, 2001; Moscovici, 1961).

The social representations works as a real system of interpretation that rules the relation of people with their environment physical and social, providing orientation to the behavior and the practices from those people. Although the representation does not determine the decisions taken by the people, they limit and orient the universe of many possibilities around. (Cramer, Brito and Capelle, 2001).

Jean Claude Abric proposed in 1978, the theory of core, showed as a compliment to the theory of social representations (Sá, 2002).

The core is showed by fundamental meanings of representation, which attribute its identity. The core gets into transformation creating in this way a new identity. It is considered in this theory the existence the named "peripheral system" it keeps the differences of perceptions between the people involved in the research, supporting a heterogeneous group and grounded the contradictions brought by the a known context. (Madeira 2001; Mazzotti, 2001).

Considering that a structure of a social representation is changed when are added or taken out elements from its core. The occurred changes in the core result changes in the proper social representation. Such changes normally are not very often and generally are restricts to the events those are not importants consequently it makes the person review his/her values, expectations and concepts in a radical way. The peripheral system represents a defined part of social representation, and compounds elements those stay around of core, they do not form negotiable values.

In the opposite inside it are organized the concepts, perceptions and values that the people are opened to negotiate, review. It allows an exchange with other groups creating a possibility of an evolution of a social representation but not changing it though.

In the research here reported, the basic interest focused in the knowledge of core on Social Representation studied and in its conclusions which were debated, emphasizing how does it work on the project offices, according to its understanding and perception.

4. METHODOLOGY PROCEDURES

The selection of people who compound the sample utilized in the research was chosen with the following criteria: people with effective experience and theory background in the project management area. At about 50% were participants from Congress on Project Management. The other ones were graduated students at the same area. One of the interest of the research was to understand the manner how the project offices have been noticing by the specialized professionals, the total of interviews were 716 people.

The core of representation – the technique utilized was free recall of words. The procedures are following below: First of all, was explaining how works the technique of free recall of words. The researches explain that the answers should be spontaneous as much as they can and not elaborate what they would express, leaving the ideas let go promptly. As an example, was mentioned a technique well known called of “brainstorm”, where the participants are stimulated to answer freely without thinking in details about what they are going to speak. After, the people were invited to write four words which would come first in their mind, working, from the word “project offices” on.

After match the four words the participants should put them in order of importance, giving “1” for the word was his/her perception, more relevant for the understanding of the concept of “work”, “2” for the second word more important, “3” for the third and “4” for the forth.

Dealing with Free recall of words. According to the technique of association or free recall of words they describe the following steps:

- Category of words
- Frequency calculation of categories
- Average calculation of free recall of words

The results are shown below as follow:

The first operation refers to the handling of information studied were the category of words mentioned by the people. They were joined in categories and the similar words in this way to avoid the variants of the same free recall of words with the equivalent semantic content, besides were considered singles, in this case it would

cause damage at the time of checking (importance order- an idea expressed in the construction of representation).

The table 63.1 shows a summary of numbers involved in the focused item:

Table 63.1
Numbers of free recall of words

Event	N°
Applied questionnaires	716
Total of free recall of words	325
semantic categories submitted	52

Next step, the calculation of frequency occurred in the categories, showed by the number of times which was mentioned by the questioned people and the calculation on average time replies (repeated), this step focus the the hierarchy position of free recall of words according to its level of importance. In case where the same person mention two or more words together belonging to the same category, they were not considered and were considered less important in the evaluation of its level. The research was reviewed on its importance level attributed to the words spoken -free recall of words- showed in the research.

In summary the information points out the frequency of times the words were spoken and its level of importance for it word or free recall of words, but they can be variable in this case, whether were requested four (4) words from 1 to 4. Whether some words appear, a hundred percent (100%) of the words spoken (free recall of words) would be qualified the most important, the average of repetition times would be equal 1. On the contrary, appearing as less relevant, its average of repetition times would be 4.

The table 63.2 shows an example of the Frequency calculation and the development of the average of repetition times (free recall of words):

Table 63.2

Category : Controlling
Number of times which the word was repeated and its level of importance at 1 st place: 41
Number of times which the word was repeated and its level of importance at 2 nd place: 81
Number of times which the word was repeated and its level of importance at 3 rd place : 86
Number of times which the word was repeated and its level of importance at 4 th place: 51
Total Frequency : $41 + 81 + 86 + 51 = 259$
Average repetition times : $[(41 \times 1) + (81 \times 2) + (86 \times 3) + (51 \times 4)] / 259 = 2.57$

The result from this groups together is showed on Figure 1, which are pointed out the elements of the core (portion divided into 4 - left superior sector) and the peripheral system (portion divided into 4 - left superior sector).

It is considered as components of the representation core, the categories located in the (portion divided into 4 - left superior sector) . The importance of those words to the people who were interviewed reflect its high number of time which the words were recalled, this result demonstrate a bigger frequency than the average, and in a high degree of importance attributed its hierarchy, consequently the ART became smaller than the average (Sá, 2002).

The categories situated in the (sector) inferior right are considered components of the peripheral system, which are the aspects less rigid of the social representation studied. They are ideas that, although are associated by the people and linked to concept of Project Offices, they are not considered essentials for an understanding about this concept, being easily changeable. (Madeira, 2001; Sá, 2002).

		AVERAGE ORDER OF RECALL	
		Less than 2,68	Equal or greater than 2,68
FREQUÊNCY	Equal or greater than 52,34	Control (259)	Fashion (68)
		Management (234)	Communication (57)
		Planning (233)	
		Organization (231)	
		Strategy (216)	
		Results (216)	
		Methodology(163)	
		Team (139)	
		Efficiency (104)	
		Projects (75)	
		Capacitation (72)	
		Innovation (63)	
		Office (58)	

Less than 52,34	Problem (50)	Support (49)
	Portfolio (48)	Scope (33)
	Leadership (45)	Commitment (32)
	Centralization (33)	Costs (30)
	Necessity (27)	Implementation (29)
	Rules (24)	Resources (15)
	Analysis (18)	Ethics (12)
	Work (14)	Resistance (7)
	Future (12)	Program (6)
	Maturity (12)	Risks (6)
	Professionalism (8)	Engineering (4)
	Experience (5)	Sponsors (4)
	Facilitador (4)	Others (4)
	Growth (4)	Stakeholders (2)
	Global (3)	Correction (1)
	Sustainability (3)	Logistic (1)
	Intellectually (2)	Satisfaction (1)
	Dream (2)	
	Search (1)	
	Perception (1)	

Figure 1

Groups organized together in sectors of categories under the analysis:

Obs: The numbers in brackets point out the times of free recall words by the set of people.

5. CONCLUSION

According to the exposure, the core shows the words more relevant of a social representation. In this presentation here, we can make some considerations about those words which compound the core in all its components.

Control, management, planning and organization were the four words -on free recall words -spoken more frequently, and they were reminded for one third of participants, impressed percentage in related to free recall words and one more important thing : were not offered previously options of words.

The activities of planning, organization, direction and control compound the called "administrative process cycle", considering the pioneer studies of Henry Fayol (1994), to the essential of administrative function. Specialists in the management projects area usually define the projects as instruments to transform corporate strategies into organizational results. It's interesting to observe that after the 4 (four) words the next order - of frequency words- appear as follows – strategy and results . Once more, is confirmed the adhesion of perception of one PMO by the participants through the social representation and the theory concepts of project management.

It's also confirmed the utilization of the Theory of Social Representations on administrative studies.

This perception can be favorable to the implementation of PMO's. The professionals of management project area are validating the development of the its hole by the Offices. If this not occur, will have a strong probability of conflicts between the managers of PMO and the Project Managers. After all, the activity of project management brings us its practice implied an ample autonomy in its existence more than usual attributed to organizational managers in traditional structures.

Second, the order of big frequencies observed comes the word "strategy" its number of free recall words was a kind of equal from the four ones. The inclusion of this word in the core shows us the important assimilation attributed to the project offices beyond the mere maintenance or organizational bureaucratic procedures.

The origin of the word "strategy", comes from greek, and means : the quality and skill of General. This meaning was created related to wars and it became part of the administrative language due to the need of shaping competitive capacity of the companies. The word refer to the General attributions and great decisions, linked to the military actions of high position. The strategy has a straight focus on great directions not in the details of work process.

From this concepts we can say that the relevant characteristics of a PMO related to Pmbok Guide (2008), is already showed previously, there is no doubt in relation to the strategy nature and the action of PMO. Activities as coordination of central communication, development of politics and general coordination of management quality, belong to the attributions mentioned and they are in fact, strategies.

"Results", the sixth word with big frequency of - free recall word - and demonstrate a strong concern with the maintenance of focus on reaching the objectives, another characteristic very important of management of projects. According to our exposition, while the project managers concentrate on reaching the specific results related to the scope of their projects, the PMO must consolidate a checking sytem of results to the organization as a whole.

"Methodology" that appears after results in the list of words which compound the core is also exact and coherent with the basic concept of PMO, among others responsibilities, is mentioned the development of suitable methodologies to the efficient project management in the Organization. And there are several methodologies previously tested and efficient those can be added by the project managers through courses which they attend and putting in practice their own professional experience.

"Team", the following word, has a connotation extremely positive, addressing to ideas as: union, articulation and effort together. It is implied in the job description of Project Managers that they need to know how to work with a team in order to accomplish his results and improving the relationship with other project teams of the Organization. There is no doubt, it's a typical mission of PMO.

“Efficiency”, which comes as follow, is related to the good performance of the activities, its characteristic is technical rationality and standards ; development of routines and suitable process. According to explained before, one of the important roles of PMO is to provide internal consulting , offering orientation, directions, standard, policies and support for application of the best practices, technical tools and software, related to project management. It must contribute in an efficient way on the management projects of Organization.

“Capacitation”, this following word can be considered quite important, understanding the modern concepts on organizational learning. The PMO has its attributions in the Pmbok Guide (2008), already showed, the function of act on internal consulting and providing instruction to project managers. Those are the attributions related to capacitation. It is shown, the added word in the core from the social representation studied.

“Innovation”, it stands for one of main attributes expected from the model of management these days . According to Pmbok Guide (2008), It's a function of PMO develop new methodologies, which represent an action related to innovation. This word has a connotation highly positive. When someone express to another person or a department a compliment, praise this action is related to innovation it's reveal the existence of a positive perception about implementation of PMO.

In the end, we have the word “office “ as well as projects, does not offer major resources for understanding of social representation studied, being only a repetition from the concept recalled.

The result of the research, showed as we notice, that the project managers have a perception extremely positive of PMO, which for sure, contributes to the expansion of its adoption that has been checked. It also showed that there is a clear perception of nature and of mission of this organizational arrangement. The words recalled are, according to described in perfect harmony with the concepts expressed in Pmbok Guide (2008). It is noticed that the free recall words by the participants does not present any contradiction, this reveal a strong perception of the importance kept in consolidation related to PMO.

One of advantages of Social Representation Theory is the easy utilization that it shows on the study how a determined phenomenon is noticed and beyond of what is rationally explained. The Social Representations as explained, are compounds not only by conscious concepts at all but emotions, personal perceptions, and ideas came from daily life, common sense in life. If the opinion of participants was checked by traditional methods as interviews and quizzes/questionnaires, would have for sure a risk on their answers, we mean, if they do not match in fact their effective perceptions to their answers. We verified in fact, that the social representation fits with the described in the document of Pmbok Guide (2008), we can affirm that there is, a perception coherent with what is officially proposed.

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