

Forum: Practical Perspectives

Policies, Children, and Road Safety: contributions from the WPR approach to policy analysis

Adriana Tenório Cordeiro ¹

Sérgio Carvalho Benício de Mello ²

¹ Universidade de Pernambuco, Caruaru / PE – Brazil

² Universidade Federal de Pernambuco / Programa de Pós-graduação em Administração, Recife / PE – Brazil

We consider public attention to child safety in traffic from the Foucault-inspired approach *What's The Problem Represented to Be?* (WPR) by Carol Bacchi, whose premise lies in using policy texts and policy proposals to access problematizations through which we are governed. It highlights a potential to rethink conventional emphases in agenda setting and in policy-making processes. The WPR approach suggests that in the internalization of children's safety discourse, the 'problem' of traffic is not given *a priori*, but is also produced discursively in the context of policies and policy proposals with practical effects on the daily lives of children in urban areas.

Keywords: policy analysis; WPR; children; road safety.

Políticas, crianças e segurança no trânsito: contribuições da abordagem WPR à análise de políticas

Consideramos a atenção pública voltada à segurança da criança no trânsito tendo por base a abordagem, de inspiração foucaultiana, *What's the Problem Represented to Be?*, (WPR) de Carol Bacchi. A premissa, neste estudo, reside em utilizar textos de políticas e propostas de políticas visando acessar problematizações por meio das quais somos governados. Seu potencial é relevante para que repensemos ênfases convencionais na definição de agenda e em processos de elaboração de políticas. A WPR sugere que, na internalização do discurso da segurança da criança, o 'problema' do trânsito não é dado *a priori*, mas produzido também discursivamente no contexto das políticas e propostas de políticas, com efeitos práticos sobre o cotidiano de crianças em aglomerados urbanos.

Palavras-chave: análise de políticas; WPR; crianças; segurança no trânsito.

Políticas, niños y seguridad vial: contribuciones del enfoque de WPR al análisis de políticas

Consideramos la atención pública a la seguridad infantil en el tránsito desde el enfoque inspirado en Foucault ¿Cuál es el problema que representa ser? (WPR) de Carol Bacchi, cuya premisa radica en el uso de textos de políticas y propuestas de políticas para acceder a las problematizaciones a través de las cuales estamos gobernados. Su potencial es relevante para repensar los énfasis convencionales en el establecimiento de la agenda y en los procesos de formulación de políticas. El WPR sugiere que en la internalización del discurso de seguridad de los niños, el "problema" del tránsito no se da *a priori*, sino que también se produce de manera discursiva en el contexto de políticas y propuestas de políticas con efectos prácticos en la vida cotidiana de los niños en las zonas urbanas.

Palabras clave: análisis de políticas; WPR; niños, seguridad en el tránsito.

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1. INTRODUCTION

According to Foucault's (1984) 'history of the present' perspective, traffic is a field of disputes and represents a 'problem' for children's safety on public roads. In the growing alert to road safety issued by governments and multilateral organizations, policies and policy proposals embrace representations of what is considered the 'problem'. At the same time, however, those policies produce problems with specific meanings that affect what is done or is not done, as well as everyday life (Bacchi, 2012).

In this study, we discuss the attention of organizations in relation to child safety in traffic, a phenomenon questioned here based on the approach *What's The Problem Represented to Be?* (WPR), by Carol Bacchi (2009). Inspired by Michel Foucault, Bacchi defends the possibility of using policies and/ or policy proposals to access problematizations through which we are governed. To think problematically, in Foucault's perspective, involves examining how something is questioned, analyzed, classified and regulated in specific periods and circumstances (Deacon, 2000).

Designating disturbing conditions, such as traffic as a 'problem' in children's daily lives, gives them a particular meaning that can be questioned as policies produce problems with specific meanings that affect everyday practices. From a closer look at what defines the political agenda, the WPR approach reflects on the general format of political initiatives, in which they engage and fail to take into account, challenging a conventional view that policies simply 'address' or 'solve' problems (Bacchi, 2016). Thus, interrogating government problematizations with this guidance provides, among other possibilities, attention to policy gaps, which can guide alternative routings in agendas and policy making by probing unexamined assumptions.

This article is structured in four more sections, in addition to the introduction. In section 2, we discuss the WPR approach taking into account its potential to assist in redefining policy agendas and processes. In section 3, we present the main excerpts from the analysis of the problematizations pointed out in this study. In section 4, we draw conclusions.

2. POLICY ANALYSIS FROM A WPR APPROACH

The Foucauldian perspective is consistent with a description of thought as a practice, and not as a mere mental, cognitive, speculative or linguistic phenomenon; it is a process that consists of objects and phenomena, and that has specific and identifiable political effects (Foucault, 1984). The WPR approach (*What's the Problem Represented to Be?*), inspired by Foucault, guides, in the discursive field, a critical interrogation of policy texts and policy proposals in a study of government problematizations (Bacchi, 2012). The relevance of studying policies in this way lies, in particular, in its potential to rethink conventional emphases in agenda setting and in policy-making processes. 'Problems' don't just wait for a solution; they are constituted as such in the context of policy processes (Bacchi, 2016).

In his study of madness, Foucault needed to access archives - practical or prescriptive texts (e.g., decrees, regulations, hospital and prison records, court precedents) - written to offer rules, opinions, and advice on behavior. Such texts are the object of a practice, since they are designed to constitute the framework of our daily conduct (Foucault, 1972). Thus, the access to problematizations begins in practices, in a 'history of the present' that shows a different or unusual aspect in contemporary discourses based on knowledge whose visible body is not exactly theoretical or scientific or literary, but practical and daily (Foucault, 1984).

Bacchi (2012) clarifies that the purpose of WPR should be to dismantle objects as fixed or given essences, questioning their natural status so that relationships that result in their emergence as objects can be traced. WPR implies questioning how a problem has been represented in a discursive field, highlighting that 'problem' representations in policies limit what is said to be 'possible' or 'desirable', 'impossible' and 'undesirable'. The analysis dimensions of the WPR approach can encompass six lines of questioning (Box 1).

BOX 1 ANALYTICAL DIMENSIONS IN A WPR APPROACH

	Lines of questioning	Rationale
1	What is the 'problem' represented to be in a specific policy or policies?	Consists of a clarification exercise; it follows from the commonsensical proposition that what we propose to do about something indicates what we think needs to change and, hence, what we think is problematic.
2	What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this 'problem' representation?	This involves identifying, via archaeological approach, the meanings, including epistemological and ontological assumptions which need to be in place for a specific problem representation to be intelligible.
3	How did this representation of the 'problem' come about?	A genealogical account that emphasizes the power dynamics in historical developments, destabilizing depictions of the present as natural and/or inevitable.
4	What is left unproblematic in this problem representation?	Reflects on what is not problematized, or silenced, within a particular problem representation, highlighting non-examined assumptions which can reveal practical effects.
5	What effects are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?	Raises questions about the kinds of effects that follow from specific problem representations, including discursive, subjectification and lived effects as a device to interrogate the ways in which specific problem representations shape subjects and their lives.
6	How has this representation of the 'problem' been defended, questioned and replaced?	Directs attention to the practices and sites involved in the production and dispersal of particular problem representations.

Fontes: Adapted from Bacchi (2015, 2016).

Within the scope of discursive approaches linked to public policies, childhood and mobility, we seek here to discern how child safety in traffic, as a ‘problem’, is represented in policies (line of questioning 1), and reflect on what is not problematized, that is, what is silenced in this representation (line of questioning 4).

Considering recommendations from Bauer and Aarts (2002) regarding the reliability and validity of qualitative studies, we constituted a research *corpus*, a set of 111 natural texts, defined as texts that characterize a state or variety of discourses (*cf.* Sinclair, 1991) about child safety in traffic. The *corpus* consists of: texts from websites linked to traffic safety (24 texts); news on government data (15); safety guides (02); technical reports on road safety (08); press publications and news portals (43); school transport union letter (01); legislation (09); action plan statements (10).

The data, collected in 2015, includes an empirical cutout that has as its starting point disputes in the school transport scenario in a Brazilian city (Recife, capital of Pernambuco). With that, we considered local articulations of school transport with the macroenvironment of policies concerning child safety in traffic. As a criterion for the selection of texts, we consider their relationship with this empirical field.

This was followed by the de-superficialization of texts, in a discourse analysis (Orlandi, 2002) that gave attention to forms of knowledge that support policies, such as pedagogical, psychological and statistical premises (*cf.* Bacchi, 2012, 2015). The WPR makes it possible to discern what is pointed out in the texts as something that needs to be changed (that which is considered problematic), in a first line of thought, and highlights non examined or silenced assumptions (which appears as not problematic in the representations), in a second instance of analysis.

3. DISCUSSION: PROBLEMATIZATIONS ON CHILDREN'S SAFETY IN TRAFFIC

The access to problematizations has as its starting point those daily practices that point out something contrasting, or at least unusual, in current discourses (Foucault, 1984). On July 8, 2015, traffic in Recife, the capital city of Pernambuco, was again quite slow, this time due to a motorcade crossing the city. From Recife's North Zone to its' South Zone, at the headquarters of the Pernambuco School Transport Union (SINTESPE), drivers, in their school vans, protested against the lack of supervision of clandestine school transport and the requirement to use the child seat in the vans, which would come into effect as of February 1, 2016 by the Traffic Departments (DETRANs), in compliance with Resolution 533/2015 of the National Traffic Council (Contran). In the same month, several other States replicated the protest against what seemed reasonable, that is, the implementation of a measure that would increase the safety of children in traffic, especially on the home-school route.

A proposal to amend the Constitution (PEC 74, 2013) included transportation as a citizen's social right. Traffic “in safe conditions” and as “everyone's right” is recommended by the Brazilian Traffic Code (CTB) (§ 2 of Art. 1, CTB, Law 9.503, 1997). The emphasis on life assurance is evident in several resolutions, such as the Chair Seat Law, which made the use of child restraint devices mandatory since 2010 (Contran, Resolution 277, 2008). In this scope, school transport is regulated and supervised to guarantee children's safety, especially due to its importance for children's access

to schools, in such a way that it presents itself as a policy ensured in the Constitution (1988), in the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDB) and the Child and Adolescent Statute (ECA).

However, not rarely, reports of accidents involving school transport are found in the media - “Child dies in a car that used to carry out illegal school transport in Rio” (METRO, 2014) or “Child dies after falling from school van in Ararendá” (G1, 2015). In 2014, organized civil society demanded, by means of a manifesto (headed by the NGO Criança Segura), more safety in Brazilian school transport, including the standardization of transport in minibuses and their certification (Portal do Trânsito, 2014). In 2015, however, there were hundreds of private school transport drivers protesting near the National Congress; in the Brazilian capital cities, drivers’ protests were part of this movement to enhance school transport based on challenging measures such as vehicles’ standardization.

The extent of the problem of child safety in traffic is addressed in studies and research. In Brazil, the number of deaths from traffic accidents can be found in the data from the insurance company *Lider DPVAT* on accidents and occurrences with compensation involving children. Data about children and young people who die or are injured, victims of traffic accidents, are released to the extent that studies seek to measure their resulting social cost. In Brazil, about twenty people arrive at a public hospital every hour with a serious injury resulting from a traffic accident; of these, five die. According to the Federal Council of Medicine, these accidents result in an annual costs of almost half a billion dollars to the Unified Health System (SUS) (Aquino, 2019; G1, 2019). Other reports point to a similar problem in many countries, including the Road Safety Annual Report (OECD/ ITF, 2015) and Global Status Report on Road Safety (Organização das Nações Unidas, 2015c).

Policy texts and policy proposals address the problem. The General Assembly of the United Nations (UN), through Resolution 64/255 (Organização das Nações Unidas, 2010), proclaimed the period from 2011 to 2020 as the Decade of Action for Road Safety, with a Global Plan for stabilization followed by reducing the level of deaths on global streets and roads. Brazil and 192 other UN Member States approved, at the UN Summit on Sustainable Development, in New York, the goal of “[...] providing safe, sustainable and affordable transport for all by 2030” (Programa das Nações Unidas para o Desenvolvimento, 2015). In 2015, at the 2nd Global High Level Conference on Road Safety, ‘Time for Results’ in Brasilia, more than 130 UN Member States approved Brasilia’s Declaration on Road Safety (2015a). A global campaign, # SaveKidsLives, collected more than one million signatures for the Children’s Declaration for Road Safety (Organização das Nações Unidas, 2015b).

As a field of disputes, there are multiple demands, actors, approaches and disagreements around traffic safety policies, whose delimitation is beyond the scope of this article. To highlight WPR’s contributions to policy analysis and policy proposals, Brasilia’s Declaration (Organização das Nações Unidas, 2015a) is the focus of our attention to highlight critical questions about the place of children in traffic safety policies, since it encompasses the commitment of more than 130 countries. Member States, United Nations agencies, intergovernmental organizations, NGOs and the private sector took part in its elaboration process, with comments and suggestions on the draft

document. After the Brazilian government proposed a draft, the text, Version Zero (03/26/2015) was made available for public consultation from April to May 2015 to civil society; after this date, the negotiation process was intergovernmental, generating Version 1 (5/28/15), Version 2 (9/4/15) and the Final Version (11/19/15).

This type of Declaration, among other texts proclaimed at the end of large-scale meetings, comprises reference documents that seek to mirror the collective construction of fundamental concepts, the understanding of issues in the area and referrals derived from these apprehensions (Pavarino, 2016), with effects on national policies. With its 31 premises (PP) and 30 objectives (OP), the document presents ‘traffic’ as a major development issue, a public health problem and also one of the main causes of death and injury worldwide. There is an emphasis on “human suffering” and “global costs”, which make “[...] the reduction of traffic deaths and injuries an urgent priority for development [...]”, that is, “[...] investment in road safety has positive impacts on public health and the economy” (Organização das Nações Unidas, 2015a, Premise 6).

It is also a prescriptive text (Bacchi, 2012), as it offers guidance on behaviors aimed at dealing with problematic aspects. In the document, among other points, priority is given to more vulnerable users, and public and non-motorized transport is emphasized to improve road safety, in addition to pointing out actions to manage road safety and improve legislation and enforcement (Box 2).

BOX 2 WPR’S USES (LINE 1) IN TRAFFIC SAFETY POLICY TEXTS

Problematic aspects: what needs to change?

- The high rate of traffic accidents and their effects
- Injuries and deaths and their social costs
- Human suffering resulting from traffic accidents
- Economic costs related to accidents
- Impacts on public health
- An unfavorable infrastructure for pedestrians, especially in developing countries
- Behaviors linked to risk factors that impair safe driving

Problematic aspects: what should be done?

- Safe transportation
- Sustainable transport
- Affordable transportation
- Special attention to people in vulnerable situations
- Vehicle speed reduction measures
- Adaptation of road safety policies to protect the vulnerable
- Use of child restraints, helmets and others
- Work-related traffic accident reduction policies
- Comprehensive, inclusive and evidence-based education and training programs
- Standardization of definitions, indicators and procedures in records

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The notion of the child in this representation (*cf.* PP3, Brasilia's Declaration, 2015) is that of a 'traffic user' (OP16) in a 'vulnerable situation' (PP11; OP16), alongside women, people with disabilities and the elderly. As the main 'victim' (PP5), the text suggests that traffic safety policies should be adapted to protect the vulnerable, and the child should be protected by safety mechanisms, including child restraint devices in vehicles (PP22), safety speed limits, road signs, speed radars with cameras and other speed restriction mechanisms in school and residential areas (OP13).

Although traffic safety is the guiding principle, there are aspects that have not been examined and silenced (Box 3). Beforehand, global action plans and resulting local policies emphasize a line of action that brings as an essential element to traffic safety "[...] the promotion of sustainable modes of transport, in particular, safe public transport and safe walking and cycling" (PP19). The emphasis on the sustainability paradigm converges with principles present in the UN 2030 Agenda (Programa das Nações Unidas para o Desenvolvimento, 2015), and its sustainable development objectives, which influenced the premises and objectives in the final document. In several countries, especially in Europe, traffic planning has changed, and the importance of promoting cycling and walking is gradually recognized in problematizations and associated with a wider variety of urban planning instruments, with practical effects on children's daily lives.

BOX 3 WPR'S USES (LINE 2) IN TRAFFIC SAFETY POLICY TEXTS

Non problematic aspects: what is not examined?

- The excess of motor vehicles in urban agglomerations
- School's role in the traffic education process
- The role of school transport in traffic safety
- Children's views or perspectives about traffic

Non problematic aspects: what is silenced?

- Measures to reduce the number of motor vehicles
- Measures to reduce the use of motor vehicles
- The role of school transport as an element that facilitates urban mobility
- Children's political representation

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Such an emphasis contrasts, however, with countries' motorization rates, which indicate an uninterrupted expansion in the number of cars. In Brazil, in a decade (2000 to 2010) the 119% increase in the number of vehicles was eleven times greater than the population increase. With the increase in the fleet, Brazil already has one car for every 4.4 inhabitants. Ten years ago, the proportion was 7.4 inhabitants per car (Denatran, 2018). In 2017, there were 50.7 million vehicles and 15.1 million motorcycles. Traffic accidents are identified by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a serious public health issue, but it was only after the year 2000 that the Organization gave greater emphasis to the theme due to the significant escalation of traffic injuries, compared to previous decades, and the increase in motorization rates, especially in developing countries (Pavarino, 2016). Despite a 20.85%

reduction in deaths from traffic accidents over a 6-year period (2011 to 2017), Brazil remains far from the goal set by the UN, of a 50% reduction in the number of victims.

Now, can the excess of motor vehicles in urban agglomerations obstruct the implementation of proposals for sustainable urban mobility foreseen in governmental problems? We understand that the WPR approach, insofar as it suggests pointing out gaps for critical scrutiny, provokes questions about the excess of motor vehicles (not the vehicle itself) leading to an inefficiency in urban flows. This is an assumption that has not yet been examined in these representations but has practical effects on children's daily lives. Mobility is represented as the property of 'fit' citizens on the move, while pointing out the need for protection from those who move differently in traffic (Cresswell, 2013). The child's right to mobility, however, is represented ambivalently.

Traffic reorganization measures are not to be confused with measures to reduce car use, that is, the guarantee of access to different modes or intermodal connections does not directly indicate the effective reduction in the acquisition or use of cars. Policies for 'reduction' or 'restriction' of car use still represent a gap in government issues. If, on the one hand, the proposition of "speed restriction mechanisms" is identified near schools and homes (Organização das Nações Unidas, 2015a), on the other hand, federal policies as in Brazil promote the opening of credit lines and reduction of the Tax on Industrialized Products, which encourage the sale of vehicles without equivalent investments in urban infrastructure.

There is also a recognition of the "[...] commitment of States and civil society to road safety by observing the annual World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims as well as United Nations Road Safety Weeks" (PP24). No mention is made of World Car Free Day - created since 1997 in France and celebrated on September 22 in cities around the world - aiming to encourage civil society to reflect on excessive car use. The increase in the volume of car traffic increases the fear of traffic accidents, with practical effects on the conduct of pedestrians and cyclists.

It is important to note that, if the excess of motor vehicles in urban agglomerations is not clearly signaled as problematic, the effects linked to excessive dependence on the car, from the perspective of public and environmental health, as well as important aspects around urban habitability (Pojani & Boussauw, 2014), are silenced. Furthermore, the role of school transport is also not examined. If we consider, for example, that in Recife (Pernambuco) the school transport service provided by vans accounts for a reduction of about 13 thousand vehicles at school doors, we could ask whether school transport would represent a facilitator of urban mobility in policies proposals.

In addition to including education and training for motorcyclists (OP19), in a perspective of behavioral adequacy for road use, the goal to "develop and implement comprehensive, inclusive and evidence-based educational and training programs, on a life-long learning and testing basis" is highlighted (OP24). The risk factors listed there are associated with the likelihood of it leading to "distraction or decreased driver capacity" (OP4). The envisaged legislation and the research follow an evidence-based approach (OP4; OP8), in a direction aimed at problem solving as a form of power oriented to the production of subjects that satisfy the goals of government policy (Bacchi, 2009).

Thus, what is foreseen in educational and training programs emphasizes behavioral orientation. In this process, the school's role in traffic education is not examined, nor is it clarified in which levels of learning 'awareness' and 'empowerment' should occur. One of the assumptions of traffic

education is that habits, skills and attitudes internalized by children influence their future behavior (when they become adults in traffic), but if this assumption is not observed in policies, we ask, from the perspective of Hillman, Adams, and Whitelegg (1990), if the reduction in the number of deaths and injuries in traffic accidents, set as a goal in government problems, would represent lives saved, or rather postponed deaths.

This reflection is pertinent considering the ambivalence with which the child's perspective is represented. On one hand, Brasilia's Declaration points out the representation of children as being dependent and vulnerable, as an object of policies. On the other hand, in the Declaration of Children for Road Safety, built by the UN in parallel with Brasilia's Declaration (and presented during the Conference), the child emerges as a political subject who presents demands regarding road safety: "[...] We call for all vehicles carrying children, anywhere and everywhere in the world, to be safe", and "if you give us safe traffic now, we can and will set a good example for future generations. Please listen and act. Save children's lives" (Organização das Nações Unidas, 2015b). Hence the version in Portuguese of the Declaration differs from the English one. Through the document, whose elaboration process took place with some degree of participation of children in different places in the world, children ask for more safety in transportation (school, car, motorbike or scooter) and also on the home-school route so they may be able to walk. However, its understanding is that: "[we are] just children and our voices are not always heard. So, we need your help so that measures are taken" (Organização das Nações Unidas, 2015b). The idea of participatory citizenship, in which children engage in the formulation of policies and proposals (such as the revision of Master Plans in urban planning policy processes), is ambivalent in the context of traffic safety policies, insofar as the child is emphasized as an object of policies and not exactly as a subject capable of participation.

4. CONCLUSIONS

In line with Foucault, WPR implies a broader understanding of government as a problematizing activity, since it includes the State as an actor alongside professionals, specialists, researchers, among others, as well as the knowledge they produce. While Foucault focused on the governing of 'madness' and 'sexuality', more conventional techniques of government, such as health and well-being policies, can be subjected to the same type of analysis (Bacchi, 2012), as is the case with policies aimed at child safety in traffic, which is our focus of attention here.

We argue that a WPR approach incorporates Foucault's suggestion about the possibility of detecting patterns in problematizations, revealing modes or styles of governing that shape lives and subjectivities (Bacchi, 2012). Based on WPR uses, we address governmental issues in which the idea of 'safety' is central. As Packer (2003) points out, it seems impossible to live and not feel the effects of a safety discourse on our lives. Safety as a discourse produces 'truths' (Foucault, 1980) that affect everyday life, including children's relationship with urban space.

To the extent that statistics provide traffic accident rates and their victims, urban mobility is problematized in policies and policy proposals in association with the risks it brings, and in this case, the idea of 'child safety' arises as the main solution. In this sense, expert knowledge is used in the production of standards that support policies aimed at ensuring the population's well-being. Packer (2003, p. 136) explains that "[...] once this orientation solidifies, it disperses into a vast

array of normative contexts, thereby legitimating forms of governance and self-governance that have little relation to any specific problematization”. Multiple organizations, governmental and non-governmental, supranational and multilateral, participate in this legitimation of personal safety as a social good (Packer, 2003).

The spaces in which we move, many of which are forged by legal and political definitions, are always significant and, as mentioned by Cresswell (2013), their meanings are constituted through specific arrangements of power. The insertion of children in government issues as being vulnerable and dependent requires that other users pay more attention to them, and demands a transfer of responsibility for their safety to other actors and organizations. Much of the rules of conduct in traffic safety policies are associated with issues involving bodily safety, which are particularly relevant for pedestrians and cyclists. But, consistent with the perspective of Hillman, Adams, and Whitelegg (1990), the ‘lapses’ associated with distractions, slow pacing or impulses - usually related to children and other ‘vulnerable’ policy audiences - can be punished with injuries or even death in the heavy traffic of urban agglomerations.

There are also behavioral aspects that reflect a desire to avoid danger, a feeling of unsafety that is not usually included in the statistics. In contrast to the displacement logic that characterized the daily lives of many children in previous decades, some practical effects of contemporary logics of disciplined mobility include the increasing monitoring of children’s movements, as well as their segregation into spaces that are intended to be ‘appropriate’. The WPR contributes to show that, in the internalization of the child safety discourse, the traffic problem is not merely given *a priori*, but is also produced discursively in the context of policies and policy proposals, with practical effects on children’s daily lives in cities.

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Adriana Tenório Cordeiro



<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4046-4403>

Doctorate in Administration by Federal University of Pernambuco (UFPE), Postgraduate Program in Administration (PROPAD); Professor at University of Pernambuco (UPE). E-mail: adriana.cordeiro@upe.br

Sérgio Carvalho Benício de Mello



<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3740-9160>

Ph.D. in Business Studies by City, University of London, United Kingdom; Professor at Federal University of Pernambuco (UFPE), Postgraduate Program in Administration (PROPAD). E-mail: sergio.mello@ufpe.br