

The constitution of the identity of professors in advanced degree courses of two higher education institutions: a study based on the relations of power and the roles in organizations

MARCOS VINÍCIUS PEREIRA CORREA

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO PARANÁ / PROGRAMA DE PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM ADMINISTRAÇÃO, CURITIBA- PR, BRAZIL

MARIANE LEMOS LOURENÇO

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO PARANÁ / PROGRAMA DE PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM ADMINISTRAÇÃO, CURITIBA- PR, BRAZIL

Abstract

This article aims to investigate the constitution of the identity of professors in advanced degree courses in a public university and in a private university. Research based on the qualitative approach, characterized as a study of multiple cases, and based on in-depth interviews carried out with 15 professors. Theoretical framework grounded in studies of identity, social roles and power in organizations. As a result, it evidenced that the professor identity is permeated by meanings derived from the socialization processes along the academic path, so that the choice of the teaching career and the meanings attributed to teaching and research were mainly built through everyday interaction experienced with their professors and students. It was observed that professors take on multiple roles in educational institutions, which together with the requirements for publication of scientific articles, cause a feeling of anguish in these actors, given that the time required to perform such a range of activities turns out to engage not only the space of universities, but other spheres of the professor's social life.

Keywords: Identity. Organizations. Roles. Power.

A constituição da identidade dos professores de pós-graduação stricto sensu em duas instituições de ensino superior: um estudo baseado nas relações de poder e papéis em organizações

Resumo

Neste artigo tem-se por objetivo investigar a constituição da identidade dos professores de pós-graduação *stricto sensu* em uma universidade pública e uma universidade privada. Pesquisa fundamentada na abordagem qualitativa, caracterizada como estudo de casos múltiplos, tendo como base entrevistas em profundidade realizadas com 15 docentes de pós-graduação. Arcabouço teórico embasado nos estudos sobre identidade, papéis sociais e poder em organizações. Como resultado, evidenciou-se a identidade docente permeada por significados oriundos dos processos de socialização ao longo da trajetória acadêmica, de modo que a escolha pela carreira docente e os significados atribuídos ao ensino e à pesquisa se construíram principalmente por meio da interação cotidiana vivenciada com seus professores e seus alunos. Foi possível constatar que os docentes assumem múltiplos papéis nas instituições de ensino, o que, em conjunto com as exigências por publicação de artigos científicos, resulta em um sentimento de angústia para esses atores, tendo em vista que o tempo necessário para desempenhar essa gama de atividades acaba por ocupar não apenas o espaço das universidades, mas outras esferas da vida social do docente.

Palavras-chave: Identidade. Organizações. Papéis. Poder.

Formación de la identidad en profesores de postgrado stricto sensu en dos instituciones de educación superior: un estudio basado en las relaciones de poder y los roles en las organizaciones

Resumen

Este estudio tiene por objetivo investigar la formación de la identidad de los profesores de postgrado *stricto sensu* en una universidad pública y una universidad privada. La investigación se fundamenta en un enfoque cualitativo, caracterizado como un estudio de caso múltiplo, teniendo como base entrevistas en profundidad realizadas con 15 docentes de postgrado. El marco teórico se basó en estudios sobre identidad, roles sociales y poder en las organizaciones. Como resultado, se evidenció que la identidad docente está permeada por significados provenientes de procesos de socialización a lo largo de la trayectoria académica, de modo que la elección de la carrera docente y los significados atribuidos a la enseñanza y a la investigación se constituyeron principalmente por medio de la interacción cotidiana con profesores y alumnos. Fue posible constatar que los docentes asumen diferentes roles en las instituciones de enseñanza superior, lo que, en conjunto con las exigencias por publicar artículos científicos, resulta en un sentimiento de angustia para ellos, teniendo en cuenta que el tiempo necesario para desempeñar esa gama de actividades acaba por ocupar no sólo el espacio de las universidades, sino también el de otras esferas de la vida social del docente.

Palabras-clave: Identidad. Organizaciones. Roles. Poder.

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INTRODUCTION

Organizations as spaces of socialization and construction of meanings enable individuals to constitute themselves as subjects in relation to themselves and with each other, so as to assume different roles in everyday life (BERGER and LUCKMANN, 1998; GOFFMAN, 2011). From this perspective, the constitution of identity is guided by the multitude of references that pervade the subjects during their lives, unfolding in relations of belonging, identification, and in ties to institutions and the different social levels around organizations (FERNANDES, MARQUES and CARRIERI, 2010).

As stressed by Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley (2008) and Hatch and Schultz (2002), the concern about the relationship between individuals and organizations is not new (BARNARD, 1971; FAYOL, 1990, MAYO, 1933; TAYLOR, 1970), however it was only with the work of Albert and Whetten (1985) that the theme of identity has been gaining ground in organizational studies. After the contribution of these authors, the study of identity provides new perspectives and reflections on the social dynamics of daily life and the meanings derived from the relationship between individuals and organizations, whether on the level of the individual, group, business or organization (MACHADO, 2003).

By recognizing the social dynamic that permeates the activities of actors in daily life, it is possible to integrate the elements of the processes of identity and identification within organizations (FERNANDES, MARQUES and CARRIERI, 2009). Therefore, in this study, identity is understood through processes of socialization, in view of the reflexive nature of subjects in their search for a self-reference, based on their experiences and transformations lived in the context of organizations (ALBERT, 1998; BERGER and LUCKMANN 1998; ASHFORTH, HARRISON, and CORLEY, 2008). On the other hand, identification consists of the bond of the subject with organizations, so that individuals can use the organization's attributes as a reference to define their own identity (DUTTON, DUKERICH, and HARQUAIL, 1994; PRATT, 1998).

The objective of the research presented in this article was to understand the constitution of the identity of professors in advanced degree courses from two higher education institutions (HEI), one public and one private, based on the power relations and organizational roles. It is a qualitative research (COOPER and SCHINDLER, 2003; CRESWELL, 2010), using multiple case study (STAKE, 2000). The two institutions are located in the same city, and the research counted on the participation of 15 professors from two advanced degree courses, both of them in a specific area of Engineering.

* Image: Pixabay. Available at <https://pixabay.com/en/faces-colors-masks-heads-wall-660786/>. Accessed on 04 October 2016.

The setting in which the career path and the constitution of identity of the professor in advanced degree courses is marked by a set of activities that implies in taking on different roles and dealing with the demands posed by these roles in the context of HEI. Thus, the daily life of the professor is made up both by the experience in the classroom, as well as by the development of other activities such as research, extension, training other professors and researchers, participation in events, publications, reviews of scientific papers, and administrative positions, among other things. Therefore, the motivation for professors to perform these activities can be both objective and subjective, i.e., this is a profession chosen not only for financial gain, but also because of elements of self-actualization (FREITAS, 2007).

When bringing together the questions of identity, social roles, and power relations in organizations, it is possible to contribute to the understanding of how the subjects appropriate the organization as a social space (ALCADIPANI and ALMEIDA, 2000; GOFFMAN, 2011). In addition, it is an opportunity to understand how they signify the dimensions of time and space considering the multiple roles they assume in organizations. Moreover, the question of identity reveals aspects inherent to social interaction when analyzing the dynamics and the reasons why the various actors relate to and identify with the organizations, either internally or externally (BROWN, 2001; BROWN, 2014).

Considering the above, the following sections will present theoretical elements used to guide the research, limited to the issues of identity, roles, and power relations in organizations. After that, the article presents the methodology adopted to collect, process, and analyze the data, which then leads to the discussion of findings and to the conclusion.

IDENTITY AND SOCIAL ROLES

The processes of socialization make it possible to understand the way in which individuals in the social field interact and share meanings, shaping themselves and the world through the relationship with the other, in an intermediation between individuals and social structures (BERGER and LUCKMANN 1998; DUBAR, 1997).

Because identity is based on the relational aspect, the individual represents different roles in relationship to other subjects in a given social environment. The individual can take on different roles in the “social stage” in order to transmit an image to communicate with the other (FERNANDES, MARQUES, and CARRIERI, 2010; GOFFMAN, 2011). Social roles are connected to a set of specific activities undertaken by individuals in the social context.

To perform certain activities and functions, individuals appropriate and build meanings in order to classify and make shared interpretations coherent in respect to the reality in which they are inserted (WEICK, 1995). As such, roles are permeated by a set of knowledge that qualifies and defines which functions are to be performed and by whom (BERGER and LUCKMANN, 1998). Therefore, it is impossible to understand a role as a representation of an isolated activity, but it is connected to a set of activities that define and are specific of the role.

Based on the definition of roles proposed by Goffman (2011), it is possible to understand social life as a dramaturgical metaphor, which develops through face-to-face interactions. The author does not intend to understand how social roles are defined or change over time. Goffman directs the focus of the analysis to the act of social interaction itself, which is permeated by the impression management performed by the individuals when representing specific roles in the relationship with each other. The roles are legitimated in social institutions and include, for example, the role of father, mother, professor, administration.

When approaching the concepts of identity and roles, it is necessary to point out that there are differences and complementarities, considering that “[...] identities organize meanings, while roles organize functions” (CASTELLS, 2002, p. 23). Despite the difference between identity and roles, both are intrinsically related, as social functions contribute so that individuals can make sense of reality and of the action in the social context.

For Berger and Luckmann (1998), the analysis of roles may be performed in order to highlight how the individual relates to society, moving away from an atomized understanding of the individual in the organizations. By bringing different voices of social actors and their relationships into the same context, it is possible to reveal the meanings that make up the story lines

guiding the representation of social roles in a given reality. In view of this issue, the next section presents the theme of identity in organizations, with the dimensions of identity and identification that guide this study.

IDENTITY IN ORGANIZATIONS

The story lines - as well as organizational changes - are able to modify the social day-to-day life, as well as provide new arrangements of meanings, so that they intertwine directly with the lives of the individuals in such contexts (FREITAS, 2000; GIDDENS, 2002).

According to Hatch and Schultz (2002) it is with the work of Albert and Whetten (1985) that the first studies on identity are highlighted in the organizational field (ALVESSON, 1990; ASHFORTH and MAEL, 1989; DUTTON and DUKERICH, 1991; GINZEL, KRAMES and SUTTON, 1993; SCHWARTZ, 1987). Based on these studies, new concepts and levels of analysis regarding identity came forth, which allowed new insights about organizations (GIOIA, 1998).

The term “organizational identity” refers to an understanding of the organization as a collective entity (macro). However, “identity in organizations” refers to the relationship of the constitution of the individual *self*, in its interaction with the organization and its members, including the interrelationship between the different organizational levels (CORLEY, HARQUAIL, PRATT et al., 2006). When relating to the organization in a process of identification, the individual does not have an “organizational identity”, so that “organizational”, when so used, could imply a conceptual confusion between levels of analysis. The identity of individuals has to do with organizational culture, because it expresses the cultural elements of a given organization (HATCH and SHULTZ, 2002).

When individuals establish a link of identification with the organization, they can use the attributes of this organization in order to define their own identity (DUTTON, DUKERICH and HARQUAIL, 1994). Thus, individuals establish ties with organizations, which are not simply material but also emotional (FREITAS, 2000). This means that the identification process is limited to loyalty; intense and lasting affiliations in the lives of individuals and groups (CHENEY, CHRISTENSEN and DAILEY, 2001). Through the identification process, individuals establish a self-definition towards organizational identity based on the similarity between the values of the subject, the organization’s values, and in adapting their values and beliefs according to the ones presented in the organization (FERNANDES, MARQUES and CARRIERI, 2009).

To understand how the interactions between social groups lead to effects in processes of identification, the Theory of Social Identity (TSI) stands out. According to Boros (2008), the perspective of TSI in organizational studies was introduced by Ashforth and Mael (1989), based on the understanding that identification involves the individual belonging to the unity of a particular social group. In view of this, the process of identification in organizations is brought about by way of three components defined by the authors of the TSI and the Self-Categorization Theory (SCT) (TAJFEL, 1978; 1981; TAJFEL and TURNER, 1979; 1985): the cognitive, affective, and evaluative.

For Tajfel and Turner (1979; 1985), the cognitive element refers to the subject belonging to a specific social group, where the subject is able to express characteristics of the group to which they belong. The affective element refers to the feelings of the subject in the process of identification, so that the subject is bound to a group if their permanence offers a positive self-definition. The evaluative component refers to the perception of the subject as to how their social group is valued by other social groups. When looking at these dimensions of the identification process, it is possible to understand the process of the constitution of identity in organizations. As stressed by Fernandes, Marques and Carrieri (2009), the dimensions of TSI and SCT support the understanding of the phenomenon of identity and identification of individuals towards organizations.

Through the processes of identification, individuals seek to establish a sense of unity and belonging to a particular human aggregation, as a way to partially find an answer to the question, “Who am I?” (ASHFORTH & MAEL, 1989). Considering the elements presented above, the next section discusses the issue of identity and teaching in the context of higher education institutions.

IDENTITY AND TEACHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

The construction of the identity of professors is associated with values and experiences lived throughout their personal and professional life. It is an identity built in a continuous and dynamic relationship over time (CIAMPA, 1987; MORGADO, 2011). In the context of organizations – in this case, HEI – the social field stands out, recognized as a space that welcomes and provides the individual with a sense of belonging, and the organizational culture builds, supports, and connects an imaginary space, which, in turn, provides the basis for the constitution of the identities of individuals (FREITAS, 2000).

Throughout the academic career, the professor establishes social and emotional bonds with advisors and other professors, who can be understood as “identificatory figures” present in the lives of professors. They stand out during the training process of these professionals and provide intellectual and emotional connections (FREITAS, 2007).

The professor builds their identity and represents their roles not only with peers, but also in everyday interaction with students, as this representation does not occur in isolation, but always in relation to the other (BERGER and LUCKMANN, 1998; GOFFMAN, 2011). In this sense, the advanced degree professor assumes the role of professor and researcher, and each of these has specific demands and activities. For the professors, research stands out as a central part of their activity, especially because they are part advanced degree courses, where the demands for publication of scientific articles are understood as a basic requirement (BASTOS, 2007).

“Academic work” is understood here as the core activities of teaching and research – which circumscribe the teaching profession. However, a specific set of skills is required to enable taking on these roles, and not all professors present the required skills or accept certain functions, which may be source of stress and anxiety. Thus, the roles of professor, researcher, and administration of higher education institutions have different requirements and competences, not often being subject to conformity (BASTOS, 2007).

Melo and Serva (2012) argue that these various activities undertaken by professors lead to a reduction in time that would be devoted to reading and research activities. Thus, teaching goes beyond delimited hours of work, as meeting the terms of their activities and projects often requires extra time.

Considering these questions, it is possible to notice that nowadays the professor ends up taking on numerous responsibilities. Being an expert in a particular area is not in itself sufficient, as they evaluate peer articles and students’ papers, prepare lessons, write articles, working at night and weekends. Such a workload has caused negative effects on the health of these professors, so that the academy today can be considered a health risk with excessive responsibilities (mainly related to publications), time compression, competition, among other things (FREITAS, 2007). If there are no articles published as result of a research, there is no incentive for research development and no incentive to remain in the career (BINI, SERVANT and MELO, 2013). In order to understand the teaching work and its consequences in HEI, the following section present issues related to power, time, and space in organizations.

SPACE, TIME, AND POWER IN ORGANIZATIONS

When highlighting the elements that constitute identity and the social roles in the context of organizations, it is possible to reflect on the way in which space, time, and power relations intertwine in the context of HEI. Thus, the workspace circumscribes the way in which the subject will create and recreate part of their identity and the dynamics of representations of the social roles taken.

Space is not only a physical dimension, but also symbolic, as it is assumed and signified by individuals. As evidenced by Fisher (1994), the arrangement of spaces in organizations is capable of structuring the way communications are organized regarding groups, their values and beliefs. These spaces do not show neutrality, but are permeated by political and ideological factors (LEFEBVRE, 1991).

Communications and definitions of roles between individuals are permeated by face-to-face relationships. In these relationships sanctions and obligations can be applied, regarding how the roles will be assumed (CARRIERI, PAES DE PAULA and DAVEL, 2008; GOFFMAN, 2011). Notwithstanding, the individual is not passive and determined by the space they occupy, but can bring meaning to the spaces assumed in the organization. The spaces appropriated by organizational subjects can be understood as consequences of culture, as they are symbolically structured to provide a basis for the development of identity and behavior (FISHER, 1994).

Identity is shaped in the socialization processes, which in turn are located in one place, in one space (PIMENTEL, 2009). The organization can be recognized as the space for belonging and identification, as work has a central place in the lives of people in industrial societies (CASTELLS, 1999; SENNET, 2009).

The interactions that pervade this space may be subject to social control, since there are both formal and informal rules that underlie the behaviors and actions of individuals in organizations (FOUCAULT, 2007; PIMENTEL, 2009). Control does not only happen in a clear and expressed way, but also in the cultural practices of reassurance, training, and moral persuasion (HARDY and CLEGG, 2001). Thus, not only the spaces but also the organizational culture can be understood as an instrument of power. This is because the representations of social imaginary are constructed in daily relationships in the organizations environment, and the organizational culture “[...] express in terms of values, norms, meanings, and interpretations, seeking a sense of direction and unity, making the organization a source of identity and recognition to its members” (FREITAS, 2000, p. 97).

The complexity of organizational spaces allow the powers to become multivalent instead of unilateral. This is because of the possibility of contestation and resistance to such powers (HARDY and CLEGG, 2001). As such, the exercise of power and control may come to affect the identity of individuals, so it is through work relationships that the individual identifies their *self* as well as the specific relationships of their world (RAPPORT, 2009).

Since “[...] the exercise of power does not consist in ordering or making decisions, but in defining the field, structuring the space in which decisions are made” (PAGÈS et al., 1987, p. 51) it is established a relationship between space and time. The dimension of time establishes a certain order in subjects’ lives (SENNET, 2009). In this way, time does not take form only by way of chronological demarcation of work according to the time clock of the organization. Time takes form also by how the subject themselves signifies and relates to time in daily activities and face-to-face interactions, unfolding in a qualitative time, circular, and in the belonging of the subject to their social ties (GOFFMAN, 2011; HASSARD, 1996; LORENZO, 2008; NOGUEIRA, 2003).

Based on these issues, it is possible to summarize that, in addition to the temporal aspect, the identity dynamic of organizational actors and the roles they develop are permeated by a stage, a space marked by rules and regulations, whether expressed or implied, that make up daily organizational life. As understood by Hassard (1996), the time that pervades the daily life of the subject can be both linear and cyclical. Linear time is composed of the objective and homogeneous dimension, i.e., as a specifically defined object. As for the cyclical time, it is qualitative and heterogeneous, made through a collective representation and abstraction of individuals, therefore, understood as a subjective element, signified by social actors.

Therefore, time defines regularities and social structures. Thus, the dynamics of space and time guide how social scenarios should be presented how the roles are to be interpreted (GOFFMAN, 2011). Considering the discussion undertaken regarding the research guiding questions, the following section presents the methodology used.

METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative research (COOPER and SCHINDLER, 2003; CRESWELL, 2010), characterized as multiple case study because it analyzes in depth a social phenomenon in two organizations – in this case two higher education institutions (STAKE, 1995; 2000). Multiple case study uses more than one case to investigate the phenomenon, observing whether cases present or do not present common characteristics (ALVES-MAZZOTTI, 2006; STAKE, 2000). For the purposes of this research, two advanced degree courses in two HEI were selected. They present common characteristics and both courses belong to the same field of study.

The cases were selected based on the courses' qualification and performance in the evaluation of Capes 5². The research considered courses that achieved grades between 4 and 7, i.e., considered as "good", "very good" and "excellent". Such choice was made to avoid sharp distinctions of structure between the courses to be studied. Thus, the authors searched on Capes website a list of advanced degree courses located in the State of Paraná, Brazil, that had achieved the grades established as criteria. Two courses in a specific field of engineering were found, both presenting grade 5 by Capes and considered the best advanced degree courses of their kind in the State of Paraná. It is worth mentioning that this research does not aim to discuss aspects of the courses field of study, since the focus is on teaching profession.

The script for semi-structured interviews (MERRIAM, 2009) was prepared based on the constitutive and operational definitions of the research. The script was submitted to a pre-test with 4 professors (2 professors in advanced degree courses in Economics, 1 professor in advanced degree courses in Nursing, 1 professor and coordinator in advanced degree courses in Administration). The pre-test allowed to better understand the field and make adjustments in the interview's script.

The interviews with professors were conducted between July and September 2014 and 19 interviews were carried out: 4 pilot interviews (pre-test) and 15 interviews with professors of advanced degree courses in Engineering (9 professors teaching at a public HEI and 6 teaching at a private HEI). In order to preserve the interviewees' identity, they were identified by letters: those from the public HEI are represented by the letter A (A1, A2, A3...). The ones from the private HEI by the letter B (B1, B2, B3...). The interviews were recorded with the interviewees' consent using an electronic device (MP3 recorder). The interviews average duration ranged from 20 to 45 minutes.

The categories of analysis are described below.

- **Identity:** the social construction through socialization processes, considering the reflexive characteristic of the subjects seeking a self-reference in their experiences and transformation throughout life and in the context of the organizations. Identity is based on processes of identification of the subject with the organization and the groups that are part of it.
- **Identification:** the social process built over the interaction and experiences lived by individuals in a specific context. Identification is unfolded in the sense of belonging and in the affectionate bond. The identification process comprises affective, cognitive and evaluative dimensions.
- **Roles:** social functions individuals perform socially and within the organizations. They are observed in the way individuals make sense of meanings and shared experience, the way individuals interact with the environment and convey an image that establishes a communication with other actors in the face-to-face interaction.
- **Power:** social relations expressed in specific actions and behaviors in the organizational context. Power relations present a multilateral characteristic because individuals can reflect on the actions in order to accept or reject elements that are part of these relations. Thus, individuals establish new forms to perceive themselves, the work and the organization. In this case, the dimensions analyzed were time (homogeneous and heterogeneous) and space (material and symbolic dimensions) that are part of the power relations.

The researcher took notes in a field journal of facts and reflections whilst interacting with the interviewees, using these data to complement the research (RICHARDSON, 2012). Through this technique, it was possible to collect information highlighting aspects of the professors' interaction through informal conversations or interaction of the interviewees with other actors in moments before and after the interviews.

The treatment of the collected data was carried out based on the transcription and organization of the interviews. The analysis of interviews and documents was conducted through content analysis. According to Bardin (2010, p. 40), content analysis can be understood as "[...] a set of techniques to analyze communications using systematic and objective procedures to describe the messages content. This research uses the categorical technique, which is one of the most used techniques for sectioning the text into units starting from the analytical categories (BARDIN, 1995). This technique was useful to highlight the nuclei of meaning in the content of what the interviewees' said, because it provides an understanding of the respondents identity constitution through the categories of analysis designed from the theoretical framework.

The software ATLAS TI version 7 was used to process the data. The software made it possible to organize the interviews transcripts and codify the content based on the definition of the analytical categories. Finally, after the data treatment, reports were

² Capes is a foundation within the Ministry of Education of Brazil. The acronym stands for "Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel", in Portuguese.

generated for each category of analysis containing specific excerpts from the interviews, and then the analysis of the underlying meanings was performed. The following section presents the analysis of the results based on the methodology applied.

ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

Data from the interviews with advanced degree professors from two higher education institutions (one public and one private), using a cross-sectional time-cut with longitudinal approximation, allowed to verify the reasons why subjects chose teaching as a profession, as well as the underlying meanings, especially in view of socialization processes (BERGER and LUCKMANN, 1998).

At first, it was necessary to collect from what the interviewees' said, the elements of their professional history. This is because the constitution of the identity is in a temporal continuum and reviewing the history contributes to the discussion about changes in meanings and in the professor's identity over time.

CONSTITUTION OF THE IDENTITY OF PROFESSORS IN HEI

The constitution of the identity of these professors is marked by experiences and interactions that took place in HEI. The socialization processes are able to reveal elements that form these professionals' identities. It is possible to highlight from what they said the influence of other professors in their choice for teaching and in the meanings connected to this choice:

When I started my degree, I had a great professor and I heard him talking about research and fell in love. Then I decided to be a professor. It is the example, that someone who inspires you. These are good fellows, very competent. You get inspired to be like them in the future (B3).

The presence of the so-called "identificatory figures" (FREITAS, 2007) makes it possible to understand how professors perceive themselves and build the meaning of teaching, especially throughout the experiences lived during their degrees, masters and doctorates, considering the context of HEIs. This issue is expressed when the interviewees mention a "passion" (affective dimension) for the research, inspired by the connection with a professor when attending a degree. In this aspect, it is observed that the identity of the professors in HEI is related to the meanings applied to "doing research", meanings that are shared and produced from the interaction. This affective charge stands out mainly from the interview of interviewee A1 when they say "I remember him, in front of me, I see him physically in front of me, explaining the concepts [...]".

It is possible to observe that the identity constitution and the processes of identification that circumscribe it are built on intersubjective relations (ASHFORTH and MAEL, 1989), because professors and students are constituted as subjects and transform themselves in the day-to-day relationship. Thus, advisors and professors of the interviewed professors are identificatory figures connected to a meaning of "mentor", or even "parent"

You always have those you consider as your parents. I owe them a lot. In truth, when I was doing my degree, I was already involved in undergraduate research. I had an advisor that helped me afterwards in the masters and presented me opportunities for a doctorate. These people inspire you and you see how they develop in their careers (A4).

The identification of professors with the HEIs is marked by the evaluative dimension. The interviewees value positively the HEI they are part of, due to the development of research activity and good working conditions, elements that show the distinction among their and other HEI. This connection of the professor stands out, for example, when the professor understands the institution as if it were an extension of himself (ALBERT, 1998), attributing an affective characteristic:

Well, I think that talking about the university is talking about myself. If I complain about the university, it is like complaining about myself, because I have been here for a long time. If I praise the university, I am praising myself too. Institutions are not the building. They are the people, and when you say “the institution does not recognize me” it means that people do not recognize you. I think that there are good things and things that need to improve. I think that the aim is to improve what has to be improved and...and this involves several things. I think people have to feel responsible for the place where they work (B6).

As presented, the cognitive, affective and evaluative dimensions in the identification process is observed because the subjects show a sense of belonging to the HEI, they value the institution in comparison to another, and express characteristics of affection towards the HEI and the other actors that are part of the organization. Therefore, HEI can represent an extension of the subject, as outlined by interviewee B6: “[...] talking about the university is talking about myself, if I complain about the university, it is like complaining about myself, because I have been here for a long time”. That is, the professor considers the characteristics of the HEI as if they were their own characteristics, reflecting a sense of belonging. In the next section, the issue of the professors’ roles in the HEI will be explored.

ROLES OF PROFESSORS IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE HEI

Socialization and social interaction make it possible to understand how individuals constitute their identity in relation to others in the organization, as well as how they share meanings. This point is relevant to understand how these professors interpret their social roles in the context of the HEIs studied, in the relationship with their peers and students in advanced degree courses. In this way, the research questioned how professors recognize and interpret their roles in everyday interactions.

The roles defined and assumed by professors at the higher education institutions are constituted by a set of knowledge that qualify and define the social functions to be performed and by whom, making it possible to organize the daily life in such institutions (BERGER and LUCKMANN, 1998). The interviewees state that, in order for a professor to enter and develop activities in an advanced degree course, a set of requirements and knowledge are needed. And these conditions not only select the members that can enter the group, but also bring legitimacy to their permanence:

Nowadays, with the evaluation done by Capes, you cannot simply enter in the advanced degree course and do nothing. You have to produce, and you are requested to do that. If you do not produce, you are de-accredited from the advanced degree (B4).

In several occasions, some colleagues criticized us. Why? Because as we needed to fulfil the requirements, when colleagues came to us [...] they had just finished their doctorate and they wanted to enter in the program, wanted to be advisors. We had to say, “that is not possible, you have to build up a curriculum first, you have to publish your work, you have to start co-advising first, then you can enter in the program”. And in several occasions our colleagues criticized us for this attitude (A2).

Among the roles professors take on, the one of researcher is legitimated in advanced degree courses by the set of knowledge acquired by professors throughout their training, publications and mentoring. As expressed by interviewees’, both the admission and permanence of the professor in advanced degree courses are based on the observation of the requirements regarding the publication of scientific articles and mentoring students.

When asking about how professors relate to their students in daily life of HEI, it was possible to verify that there is a sense of “closeness” between students and professors in both public and private HEI. Professors express that the relationship with the students has changed over the years. When they were students in their degrees, there was a sense of “distance” in the face-to-face relationship with their advisors and professors:

Nowadays there are less communication barriers than there was in the past. We had the professor far away. Today, you see the professor meeting and talking to the student [...] Then the student feels that it is different, you know, there is a real openness and it is possible to start a dialogue (A2).

I like to follow the students closely at the lab. I am not that professor that stays in the office. Whenever it's possible, I am at the laboratory with the students because many things we develop are things we are doing for the first time. I want to know what is going to happen. My curiosity is bigger than theirs (B4).

Through the statement collected and transcribed here, it is possible to note that the aspects involved in the face-to-face interaction (GOFFMAN, 2011) between students and professors in the daily life of HEI are expressed by the sense of "closeness", and refer to the affective dimension. The representation of the roles of 'professor' and 'researcher' that the professors take on is permeated by a need for students to show interest and participate. This return from the students reveals the characteristics of the professor's identification with their work.

Differently from the relationship with the students, it is observed that, in the interaction of the professors with their peers, there is a sense of "separation", which shows the impression management (GOFFMAN, 2011). Based on the interviews, it is possible to say that there is a separation between the social and the professional dimension in the day-to-day relationship:

I think that, when it comes to professional life, you do not have to like or dislike people. You have to live together, professionally. So, I have to talk, seek to have a good relationship with everybody. I am here and I do not have to live together with a person outside if I do not like them. So, when I come here, I am a professional (A3).

Considering the statements presented, it is possible to understand that there is a difference in the interaction of the professors with the students and the professors with their peers. In dealing with students, as previously demonstrated, there is a relationship of "closeness", while in the responses regarding the relationship with peers in HEI, a "separation" between the social and the professional dimension is revealed.

The choice for teaching is characterized by the roles of research and teaching. When the professor participates in an advanced degree course, however, there are other roles to take on:

I think that what disturbs the professors' lives are not their teaching activities, but those administrative tasks such as meetings, reports [...] For instance, one is in the position of researcher and professor, then suddenly they have to become chief of the department, taking care of students and of other professors. This is something that disturbs a lot (B6).

The professor ends up not only taking the role of researcher, but also the administrative role in advanced degree courses. Both present different requirements and not all professors are able to meet the expectations for these roles, which are not always subject to compliance and cause stress for this professional (BASTOS, 2007). Thus, the professor's efforts to carry out the roles of researcher and teaching have to be expanded, comprising other roles related to the administration of the courses, as expressed by interviewee B6. In order to advance in the debate about the roles of professors in HEI, the dimensions of time, space and power are discussed below.

SPACE, TIME AND POWER WITHIN HEI

In the context of the HEI, professors take ownership of the organizational space and represent their roles in everyday life. The meanings, values and beliefs shared in the organization consolidate a sense of belonging to the HEI, grounding the bases by which professors constitute their identity (BERGER and LUCKMANN 1998, FISHER 1994, PIMENTEL 2009, PIMENTEL and CARRIERI 2011).

Professors consider the workspace in the HEI a “conquest”. Through the statements of the interviewees, it is possible to highlight a conflictive aspect of social relations both in the daily relationship of professors with their peers, and of professors with the university. It is from this perspective that professors attribute this sense of “conquest”:

The space for research must be conquered. It is not automatic. The university has a space to develop research, it is like “you work in this area, so you need to have this or that”, no. The university apparently do not see that, so there is an important work of convincing and getting this. It is not easy. In truth, we are missing it. We miss infrastructure for research (B2).

We did not have space, this room here was awful, I spent a year and a half in the university without space, with no room for me. Imagine if I had a laboratory [...] because people retire and did not want to give away their space. But when the equipment starts coming, when money starts coming, then we get some space. Thus, all this has been a great learning process for life (A3).

This sense of “conquest” attributed by the interviewees regarding the workspace in the HEI can be observed, for example, in the statement of interviewee A3. According to the interviewee, retired professors did not want to give up their spaces, and over time it was necessary to gradually “conquer” such spaces. This sense of belonging to the workspace, comprised with meanings structured by interaction, reveals a sense of “territoriality” to the identity (FISHER, 1994), and in these spaces of interaction, sometimes there is a congruence between them, sometimes there is a border separating the spaces according to the interests of the professors (LEFEBVRE, 1991).

The social relations established in organizational spaces are also permeated by the meaning applied to time. Time and space are intertwined in the plots whereby professors interpret their roles in the daily life of the HEI. The time delimitation is able to define and control the development of the professors’ activities in the spaces of the organization. In this context, working time in the teaching profession is limited by the amount of workload reserved for activities related to degrees or advanced degrees. Therefore, in the rules and norms that coordinate the representation of social roles, lies the understanding of a linear time, predetermined by the organization (HASSARD, 1996).

When professors take on these contradictory roles, the way they perceive themselves and their work changes, raising feelings of anguish over the experience of an activity that they realize has no end. This is clarified by interviewee A2:

The activity for those that want to work, they are really exhaustive. Yesterday, for instance, I went to sleep at 0:30am. So, from 6pm to 0:30am on Sunday I was working on the project. And it happens several times [...]. The perception is that I am a person that will never be satisfied, like able to say “I got it, I finished my work”. No. Why? Because I am thinking that I am finishing one thing and still have other ten, or another ten things to do arrived in my e-mail. What do I do? (A2).

Taking all the above into consideration, the time for professors, both of the public and the private HEI are predominantly heterogeneous, because these professionals take on several roles that can compete with each other. Thus, for example, the roles of professors, researchers and administrative staff eventually extrapolate the time dedicated to the academic work, reaching other spheres of the professor’s social life and competing with their roles in society, as a parent, spouse, among others.

CONCLUSION

This research aimed to investigate the constitution of the identity of professors in advanced degree courses considering their social roles and power relations. The research was conducted in two higher education institutions, one public and one private, located in the same city, using the multiple case study approach (STAKE, 2000). The researchers interviewed 15 professors of the two HEI, working in two advanced degree courses in a specific area of Engineering.

The contributions of this study are in the interface between identity and roles, because they are aspects that broaden the understanding on the reality and on the social dynamics that make up the organizations. Through this research, it was possible to show how the actors in an organization constitute themselves and the organization itself, considering the definitions of space, time and power in order to add subsidies to the study of the phenomenon under analysis. In view of these elements, the understanding of the work of professors in advanced degree courses was expanded, especially regarding the multiple roles taken and the requirements either to remain in advanced degree courses and in terms of publishing research.

In order to reach the proposed goal, it was necessary to unveil the socialization processes experienced by professors throughout their academic career and in their daily lives. It was possible to observe that the choice for the teaching career and the meanings applied to teaching and research were built especially throughout the interaction experienced by the respondents with their own professors and then with their students in the HEI. Through the cognitive, affective and evaluative dimensions proposed by Tajfel and Turner (1979, 1985), it was possible to verify that the interviewees established an identification not only with their professors and advisors throughout their academic training, but also with the HEI in which they work.

The constitution of the identity as professor is not a finished project. It changes over time. Becoming a professor is to recognize your world in the student and in peers, and from there to build the story and the stages to 'play' their roles in HEI. The professor in advanced courses assumes multiple roles, such as teaching, research and sometimes the administrative role. Each of these roles implies specific requirements. At the same time that the professors want to develop their role as researchers, they end up assuming the administrative role, and there is a sense of anguish because interviewees consider administrative roles as secondary. This role takes time and expertise that professors often think they do not have. As for the role of researcher, professors recognize that their research is often measured by the number of scientific articles generated, and that their position as professors in advanced degree courses is guaranteed strictly because of this criterion, which distracts them from what they actually consider significant for the development of their academic career.

The understanding of space as a symbolic dimension reveals a feeling not only of identification and affectivity from the professor towards the HEI, but also a sense of belonging to a space, a sense of "territoriality", where professors seek a base for identity. In this way, the dynamics of the power relations of daily life in the HEI is evidenced, because for the professors there is a separation between the social and professional dimension in the interaction with their peers. Power relations would change the way professors understand and signify their own work, reflected in the representation of their roles in the interaction with their peers. In a way, as highlighted earlier, the social stage in which professors assume and interpret their roles is not a neutral space, but a space experienced in the midst of divergent interests.

Space and time are intertwined in the daily life of universities, reflecting on how professors act in their roles. The time in the HEI refers not only to the objective time, measured and calculated in the work. It refers also to an understanding of time as subjective, meaning and experienced by professors. Thus, time is heterogeneous, because in the space of HEI professors have to represent multiple roles, which can sometimes be complementary, even diffuse. This shows the understanding of time beyond the workspace, since the academic work sometimes starts to compete with other roles (father, mother, child, spouse, among others), due to their specificities. It should be noted that even though it has been reported that it is a profession that offers freedom of action, this freedom reflects a sense of anguish and stress for these professors.

Therefore, it is noticed that in the advanced degree courses the pressure for publication and the multiple roles assumed by professors can influence their identity and the way in which they represent their roles. The studied aspects shown to be convergent among professors of the two HEI studied. There was no evidence of possible resistance to such aspects, since they are issues legitimized and considered essential for the permanence of professors in advanced degree courses. This range of activities related to the roles professors take on use not only the space and time in the universities, but also other spheres of the professors' social life.

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Marcos Vinícius Pereira Correa

Doctorate student in Administration at the Federal University of Paraná (UFPR). E-mail: marcoscorrea@ufpr.br

Mariane Lemos Lourenço

PhD in Social Psychology from São Paulo University (USP). Associate Professor at the Department of General and Applied Administration at the Federal University of Paraná (UFPR). E-mail: psimari@uol.com.br