



## Individual competencies and organizational modernity: a comparative study between professionals from Minas Gerais and Bahia

### *Competências individuais e modernidade organizacional: um estudo comparativo entre profissionais de organizações mineiras e baianas*

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**Abstract:** This paper aims to analyze the results of two empirical studies designed to investigate the relationships between the constructs *Individual Competencies* and *Organizational Modernity*. In other words, we sought to investigate the extent to which the discourse that appeals to the exploitation of workers and the need for increasingly sophisticated competencies has been supported by modernity in the management policies and practices. Using the framework of Organizational Modernity and a review of Anglo-American and French Research on the construct *Competencies* developed by the latter author, the article presents the results of two empirical surveys covering 703 professionals related to organizations from the states of Minas Gerais and Bahia. In methodological terms, the research can be characterized as quantitative, conducted by means of the *survey* technique, using questionnaires to collect data. The results show that the demand for professionals with increasingly comprehensive and sophisticated skills has not been accompanied, at the same level, by the modernization of policies and management practices, suggesting the need for organizational environments more adherent to the new professional profiles required.

**Keywords:** Individual competencies; Organizational modernity; HR development.

**Resumo:** Este trabalho tem como objetivo central comparar resultados de duas pesquisas empíricas destinadas a investigar relações entre os construtos *Competências Individuais* e *Modernidade Organizacional*. Em outros termos, investigar até que ponto o discurso que faz apelo à valorização dos trabalhadores e à necessidade de competências cada vez mais sofisticadas tem sido suportado por uma modernidade na gestão das organizações investigadas. Utilizando como referencial teórico o modelo de indicadores de modernidade organizacional, assim como revisão procedida por esse autor de estudos anglo-americanos e franceses sobre o construto *Competência*. Para tal, analisa resultados de dois levantamentos empíricos abrangendo um total de 703 profissionais vinculados a organizações mineiras e baianas. Em termos metodológicos, os levantamentos podem ser caracterizados como de natureza quantitativa, realizados por meio da técnica de *survey*. Os resultados revelam que a demanda por profissionais dotados de competências cada vez mais abrangentes e sofisticadas não tem sido acompanhada, em mesmo nível, por uma modernidade de políticas e práticas de gestão, sugerindo a necessidade de ambientes organizacionais mais aderentes aos novos perfis profissionais requeridos.

**Palavras-chave:** *Competências individuais; Modernidade organizacional; Desenvolvimento de pessoas.*

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## 1 Introduction

The pressure upon business competitiveness, technological progress and constant changes in marketing conditions represent evidence of the requirement for organizations to revisit and restate their management models, particularly those veered towards managing their human assets.

As posited by authors such as Prahalad & Hamel (1990), and Bartlett & Ghoshal (1987), to the extent that traditional competitive advantage sources – such as technology and inexpensive labor – no longer suffice to ensure a sustainable competitive position, individuals and their competencies are highlighted as core strategic differentiation elements. In this perspective, the development of a business depends on the organizations' capabilities to invest in and develop people.

If, on the one hand, such new reality prompts the emergence of the importance of valuing *intellectual capital* and recognizing the relevance of people as competitive advantage sources, on the other hand reports concerning the heightening of the work load brought upon workers were not uncommon. Such fact commonly ensues from organizational delayering processes and from the sophistication of control mechanisms, in addition to the increase of pressure applied upon workers, including that for continuous professional refreshing, legitimized by discourse including themes such as competitiveness, employability and competency (Storey, 1995).

From the theoretical viewpoint the construct *Competency*, notably, is not recent. Currently, however, this construct has been comprehensively discussed by researchers from different fields (Spencer & Spencer, 1993; Boyatzis, 1982; McClelland & Dailey, 1972; Manfredi, 1998). Given multidisciplinary contributions, as of yet there is no talking about consensus regarding its conceptualization. Consequently, it is of the essence that the *competency* notion be investigated in the current context, as ensuing from significant changes in economic, organizational, social, cultural and market conditions (Fleury & Fleury, 2001).

In the face of such scenario, this article presents the results of empiric data surveys that sought to investigate to what extension the diffusion of such discourse appealing to valuing workers and requiring increasingly sophisticated has been accompanied by the modernity of managerial policies and practices, capable of providing an organizational environment propitious to the development of such required competencies.

In other words, this study seeks to investigate the relations among the professional competencies most required in the current context of organizations in the Brazilian States of Minas Gerais and Bahia, and the

level of evolution of their managerial policies and practices. For such, two surveys were conducted, one involving 654 professionals from organizations in Minas Gerais and the other convening 49 professionals belonging to companies in the State of Bahia.

Specific objectives included investigating the best-valued, most required competencies by the organizations to which the investigated professionals belonged, and also the adequacy between these competencies attributes and the stage of their organizational practices.

A broad review of studies involving the *Competency* construct was used, in addition to managerial practice and policy evolution indicators, notably those germane to human resource management. In marketing terms, the surveys that supported the findings of this article can be characterized as studies quantitative in nature, and conducted using the survey technique. Data gathering was conducted by questionnaires applied to professionals from organizations from the States of Minas Gerais and Bahia.

Initially, the data-gathering instrument was tested and validated in an empirical research conducted in the State of Minas Gerais, involving 654 professionals and later replicated with 49 professionals in the State of Bahia. It is well to highlight that both cases enabled the comparison of data, allowing for the corroboration of evidence concerning the most required professional competencies in the investigated contexts and their relations with the modernity of policies and practices adopted by the organizations where they work.

In relevance terms, the survey proves significant, mainly upon extending the studies around the *Competency* notion, correlating it with other constructs such as *Organizational Modernity*. It also becomes evident, to the extent that it seeks to extrapolate the traditional approaches to competency centered upon the conception, recruitment and selection of ideal profiles, incorporating the construction of organizational ambiances (enabling contexts) that may serve as support to the application of the required competencies.

Finally, its potential cannot be ignored, as concerns the contribution to results that will provide organizations with the development of change projects that will veer them towards the real track towards modernity, considering one of its core, however often ignored, dimensions: the human element.

## 2 Theoretical framework

### 2.1 Professional competencies

The concept of competency is not recent. Essentially, it represents a considerably ancient notion (re-) conceptualized and (re-)valued in the current context due to factors such as the production restructuring

processes, the unpredictability of economic and organizational situations, and substantial labor market changes, especially ensuing from globalization processes (Fleury & Fleury, 2001).

However, many are the concepts attributed to the competency notion. The inexistence of consensus regarding its conceptualization, besides divergences of philosophical and ideological nature can also be attributed to their use with different foci in different knowledge areas (Manfredi, 1998).

The absence of conceptual unanimity notwithstanding, Barato (1998) highlights the prevalence of two main trains of thought. The first, Anglo-American in nature, which takes the labor market as a framework and focuses on aspects germane to performance parameters as required by organizations. The second stems from France, and emphasizes the link between work and education, denoting competencies as ensuing from systematic formation and learning processes.

Similarly, Steffen (1999), upon analyzing competency according to different theoretical-philosophical trains of thought, identifies models that follow the *behavioral* conception, typical of the American system and centered upon the definition of individual attributes capable of entailing superior organizational performance; and the *constructivist conception* developed in France, which highlights the learning process as the core mechanism for the development of professional competencies.

Sant'Anna (2002) posits that, despite different approaches to the *Competency* construct, a few common issues can be identified. First, competency is commonly presented as a set of characteristics or requirements – knowledge, understandings, aptitudes, skills – designated as a condition to yield superior results and/or problem-solving (Spencer & Spencer, 1993; Boyatzis, 1982; McClelland & Dailey, 1972).

Another common point to different contemporary meanings of competency is, according to the author, its high conformity to demands stemming from now-fashionable restructuring and production modernization processes (Desaulniers, 1997; Stroobants, 1997; Hirata, 1992).

Zarifian (2001) understands that the current definitions upon which the competency model rests are characterized by a strong influence of approaches typical of the 1970s around the job qualification concept. Through this perspective, “[...] professional competency is a combination of knowledge, know-how, experience and behaviors performed within a precise context” (CNPQ, 1998, apud Zarifian, 2001, p. 12).

In the same vein, Kilimnik et al. (2004) add that competencies are contingent to the extent that they are developed and exercised in particular contexts, undergoing the influence of situations and that are linked to the culture within which the organization is

positioned. Thus, organizational roles and functions belonging to a specific culture involve characteristics depending on each of its components’ social, personal and professional networks.

Anyway, a broadly disseminated conception of competency defines it as a set of knowledge mobilized in a working situation, especially: 1. Specific knowledge for the performance of a task; 2. Aptitudes, personal and professional intelligence; and 3. The will to develop and put new competencies in practice (Dubar, 1998). Thus, competency can be construed as ensuing from multiple understandings, obtained in myriad manners: via transfer, leading and processes that enable the individual to create a knowledge and skill base capable of contributing towards the resolution of real situation problems.

In the same vein, Stroobants (1997) also defines it as the result of three core components: *Understandings*, or formal knowledge that can be translated into facts and rules; *Know-how*, which belongs in the sphere of empiric procedures, such as tacit knowledge developed in professional or occupational praxis; and *Knowing how to be*, construed as social or common-sensical understanding, including visions of the world.

From the understanding of competency as ensuing from a combination of multiple understandings, Sant'Anna (2002) identified, from a comprehensive review of Anglo-American (including authors such as Spencer & Spencer, 1993; Boyatzis, 1982; McClelland & Dailey, 1972), and French (for example, Zarifian, 2001; Stroobants, 1997) literatures, using the category content analysis technique (Richardson, 1985), fifteen professional competencies most often indicated in the reviewed works as required to cope with the current business context (Chart 1).

Basing on the above mentioned competencies, this author devised and statistically validated, by means of multivariate techniques, a scale to measure the required professional competencies, which as first applied to the study conducted in the Brazilian States of Minas Gerais and later replicated in companies in the State of Bahia.

## 2.2 Organizational modernity

At the level of organizations, modernity has been commonly evoked to highlight the need companies have to prepare to cope with competition following the patterns of the new business world setup, by adopting corporate strategies and managerial practices that favor the establishment of contexts conducive to competent behaviors.

According to Gonçalves (1997), conventional arms have not been adequate to cope with the demands brought upon organizations by the current business environment. He posited a breach from the past, leaving

**Chart 1.** Professional competencies.

<b>Professional Competencies</b>	<b>Capacity of quickly learning new concepts and technologies</b>
	Team work capacity
	Creativity
	Comprehensive, global view of the world
	Capacity to commit to the organization's objectives
	Capacity to communicate
	Capacity to deal with uncertainty and ambiguity
	Mastery of technical knowledge associated to the position taken
	Capacity to innovate
	Interpersonal relationship capacity
	Action and decision-making initiative
	Emotional self-control
	Entrepreneurial capacity
	Capacity to yield effective results
Capacity to deal with new, uncommon situations.	

Source: Sant'Anna (2002).

aside traditional practices and creating innovative solutions capable of endowing organizations with the competencies required by new challenges. This calls for a complete review of traditional corporate models.

The great challenge consists in developing people with the required profile by this new type of organization. Such effort requires morphing task employees into process professionals; rethinking employee roles; reinventing management systems; institutionalizing learning as a daily practice in addition to shaping a new culture that is supportive of new manners of working (Gonçalves, 1997).

From the theoretical-methodological viewpoint, modernity allows for myriad interpretations, from a cultural focus, running through a phenomenological approach that construes modernity as a technical-material and/or political-ideological phenomenon, in addition to religious, ethical-behavioral, economic and geographic foci. Therefore, the study of the *modernity* construct comprises the confluence of several areas of knowledge, as required by their several philosophical-ideological matrices (Gonçalves, 1997).

In historical terms, in turn, the modernity concept can be introduced as of specific characterizations – the technology myth, the prevalence of scientific reasoning, the notion of progress, the exaltation of democracy – that set it apart from previous periods of mankind, such as the primitive and the medieval worlds (Zajdsznajder, 1993).

Touraine (1994), however, understands that for a long time modernity was defined only by the effectiveness of instrumental rationality, ignoring the human element as creation. This reduction bred the foundations of its crisis, and overcoming it – and the establishment of the new modernity – assumes rescuing its other half: the subject.

Through this perspective, in its narrowest sense, modernity may be construed as the re-directioning of man towards the center of society, contemplating its different dimensions: technological (combining rationalization and subjectivation); social (to the extent that subjectivation is only possible via social movements); political (given that democracy is the regimen that allows the individual's free expression); and cultural (since all freedom and effectiveness values are at its origins) (Touraine, 1994).

Eboli (1996), basing on Touraine's (1994) ideas and also adding perspectives cast by Brazilian researchers such as Faoro (1992) and Motta (1992) proposed the transposition of that author's approach to the organizational context. By way of consequence, she established a set of indicators comprising the organizations' cultural, political, social, administrative, economic and technological dimensions.

Resting upon the approach proposed by Eboli (1996), Sant'Anna (2002), using multivariate statistical techniques, grouped modernity indicators into three factors, called Administrative and People Management Modernity, Political Modernity and Cultural Modernity (see Chart 2).

As highlighted by Eboli (1996), establishing organizational modernity indicators represents a fundamental stage for the conduction of research in this area, since only upon the identification and selection of the main variables will the comprehensive and complete evaluation of corporate management modernity be possible.

### 3 Methodology

Considering the traditional typology of scientific investigation methods, the empirical data surveys that subsidized the findings of this article can be

**Chart 2.** Organizational modernity indicators.

<b>Administrative and People Management Practice Modernity</b>	<b>The organization's compensation system rewards acts of competency</b>
	The organization is strongly oriented to results
	There is an evaluation system that allows for the differentiation between good and bad performance
	The organization adequately balances concerns with financial results, with people, and with innovation
	Human resource policies and practices encourage people to be concerned with continuous learning
	Main criteria for promotion are the individual's competency and productivity
	The organization combines the use of advanced technologies and the creativity of people in a balanced manner
	The technology employed favors the interaction between people and areas
	The organization's policies and practices encourage people to be well-informed and updated at all times
	The organization's strategy, mission, objectives and goals are clearly defined
	The organization's human resource policies and practices encourage personal and professional development
	Overall, employees know what they should do to collaborate towards the organization's objectives
	The organization accepts behavioral diversity and respects individual differences
	The work environment facilitates relationship among people, even those at different hierarchical levels
<b>Political Modernity</b>	The organization's decision-making process is decentralized
	The organization favors decision-making autonomy
	As concerns the political aspect, the regimen prevailing in the organization can be characterized as democratic
	Decision-making processes are participatory and transparent
	The organization counts on participatory management systems that encourage people's initiative and action
<b>Cultural Modernity</b>	The organization's internal ambiance encourages new, creative ideas
	The organization's internal ambiance encourages people to be in a continuous learning process in their working routines
	There is an encouraging ambiance in the organization such that people can pursue their activities and seek to exceed themselves
	The organization encourages individual initiative and responsibility

Source: Sant'Anna (2002), adapted from Eboli (1996).

characterized as field studies of a quantitative nature, conducted via the survey technique (Roesch, 1999). They can also be classified as research of a descriptive nature, since they sought, as per the characterization of descriptive surveys proposed by Kerlinger (1980, p. 171), “[...] to determine the incidence and distribution of characteristics and opinions of populations of persons, obtaining and studying characteristics that are presumably representative of such populations”.

These surveys can also be characterized as a comparative case study, in which relations among the investigated variables were described (among competencies and modernity indicators), and the findings identified in the Minas Gerais State organizations were matched to those found in companies installed in the State of Bahia.

As concerns the data collection instrument, both surveys employed questionnaires with questions measured using Likert scaling (Malhotra, 2006), applied to a considerable number of respondents (who were enrolled in specialization courses offered by higher education institutions in Belo Horizonte) and 49 professionals from companies installed in the State of Bahia. Notably, in the first stage, the research instrument was tested and validated with Minas Gerais respondents and replicated in the Bahia study at a later time, which considered 49 respondents.

Questionnaires, in general, were divided into two parts: the first containing questions about the variables investigated (required competencies and organizational modernity) and the second containing

questions concerning the characterization of the organizations' and the respondents' profiles.

The Minas Gerais research used an 11-point Likert scale, comprising response options within the [0, 10] interval, in which the closer the indicator is to the scale's upper limit, the greater the demand for competencies will be, and the higher the index of management modernity in the investigated companies will be. The research questionnaire applied to Bahia professionals contemplated a 5-point Likert scale [1 to 5], corresponding to the following statements: I fully disagree (1), I partially disagree (2), I am indifferent (3), I partially agree (4) and I fully agree (5). The option for using different scales in each case is due to the discussion existing in literature about the extension to which different scales can yield different outcomes. The findings in this study – presented in the following sections – prove that scale size did not have significant impacts upon research outcomes.

As concerns the variables under study, both empiric investigations conducted adopted the organizational modernity scale as developed by Sant'Anna (2002) from the Organizational Modernity Approach Patterns (Eboli, 1996), in addition to a scale of competencies devised by the earlier author and based on the review of Anglo-American and French approaches to 'competency'.

Both investigations contemplated the calculation of frequency distributions for statistic data treatment, in addition to central tendency (average and median) and variability measures. For this purpose, the software *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences* – SPSS was used, considered as one of the most complete and disseminated systems for statistical data analysis in the human sciences area currently available in the market.

## 4 Data presentation and analysis

### 4.1 Characterization of respondents

The profile of the professionals from organizations installed in Minas Gerais organizations is, for the most part, young (51.8% of respondents aged up to 35 years) and well-split as concerns gender (51.5% males and 48.5% females). Participants from Bahia can also be characterized as a young public (52.2% aged up to 35 years), however including a superior percentage of male respondents (65.3%).

In professional terms, the prevalence of individuals with a short tenure in their respective organizations is seen in both cases, and 45.6% of respondents indicated between 1 and 5 years tenure with their companies in Minas Gerais, and 38.8% in Bahia. Respondents also indicated that they have been in their current positions for a short time, as reflected by the percentages of 52.2% in Minas Gerais and 50% in Bahia companies.

As concerns positions taken, the prevalence of managerial position incumbents is notable in Minas Gerais (41.0%), followed by specialists (31%), technical level (18.2%) and self-employed (9.8%). In Bahia, the percentage of professionals in managerial positions is quite higher than that observed in Minas Gerais companies (74.3% of respondents).

As concerns the organizations in which the professionals work, different company profiles were seen. In Minas Gerais there is a prevalence of organizations with headcounts greater than 500 employees (55.5%) and veered towards the services industry (68.2%), while in Bahia small-sized companies prevail, with headcounts of up to 100 employees (51%) and from the manufacturing industry (62.5%).

In addition, there are differences as concerns stock control of the organizations under study: in Minas Gerais, 48.3% of them are private, domestic organizations, followed by 33.9% of State-owned companies and 17.8% of multinational corporations; in Bahia, privately held, domestic companies prevail (80.9%).

### 4.2 Analysis of data referring to the required professional competencies

This section presents the data obtained concerning the level of competencies required by organizations in Minas Gerais and Bahia. Note that indices close to the upper limit of the scales – 10 in the Minas Gerais case and 5 in the Bahia case – indicate that companies have intensely demanded the competencies brought together in Sant'Anna's model (2002) to cope with the current business environment.

Data analysis unveiled, in both cases, the significant perception of respondents regarding the competencies related to the companies' performance, such as the capacity of their professionals to commit to organizational objectives and to yield effective results. Interestingly, these findings can be partially explained by the positions taken by most respondents in Minas Gerais and Bahia organizations, indicating that the professionals indeed feel responsible for organizational performance.

Specifically in the organizations from Minas Gerais, respondents considered the capacity to commit to organizational objectives (average of 8.6), interpersonal relationship (8.5) and yielding effective results (8.5), in this sequence, as the professional competencies most required by the companies where they work (see Table 1). A similar phenomenon was observed in the companies from Bahia, except for the third most requested competency. Therefore, in the Bahia context, the best-valued competencies were capacity to commit to organizational objectives (4.1), interpersonal relationship (4.0) and teamwork (4.0).

**Table 1.** Professional competencies.

Professional Competencies	Minas Gerais [0.10]		Bahia [1.5]	
	Average	Median	Average	Median
Capacity to commit to the organization's objectives	8.6	9.0	4.1	4.0
Interpersonal relationship capacity	8.5	9.0	4.0	4.0
Capacity to yield effective results	8.5	9.0	3.9	3.0
Teamwork capacity	8.4	9.0	4.0	3.0
Capacity to communicate	8.4	9.0	3.8	4.0
Emotional self-control	8.1	8.0	3.8	4.0
Action and decision-making initiative	8.1	8.0	3.7	4.0
Capacity to deal with new, uncommon situations	7.9	8.0	3.7	4.0
Capacity to learn new concepts and technologies quickly	7.8	8.0	3.5	4.0
Mastery of new technical knowledge associated to the performance of job or position taken	7.7	8.0	3.7	3.0
Capacity to deal with uncertainty and ambiguities	7.7	8.0	3.5	4.0
Creativity	7.7	8.0	3.4	4.0
Capacity to innovate	7.5	8.0	3.6	4.0
Comprehensive, global view of the world	7.2	7.0	3.3	3.0
Entrepreneurial capacity	7.2	8.0	3.2	4.0
<b>Index of Professional Competency</b>	<b>8.0</b>	<b>8.3</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>3.7</b>

Source: Authors (2013).

Interestingly, respondents emphasized competencies of a relational and personal nature (teamwork capacity, communication and emotional self-control), which was proven in both investigations at significant indices. Aubrun & Orofiamma (1991) defined these capacities as *third dimension competencies*, which are characterized not for being craft skills or technical expertise, but rather for personal and relational qualities.

Despite the demand for the development of relational and emotional competencies, professionals from Bahia companies called attention to the fact that the main development actions that companies have pursued concern technical training and referring employees to lectures, congresses, and events. These findings are a heads-up for the need to turn the nature of the required competency to the type of training provided.

Concerning less required competencies, a strong convergence was noted between the Minas Gerais and the Bahia cases, that is, competencies relating to "entrepreneurial capacity" and to "a comprehensive and global view of the world" were considered the most relevant in the context of the investigated organizations. Nevertheless, a high score was noted for all investigated competencies, since all indices came closer do the upper limit than to the lower limit (10, in the Minas Gerais context and 5 in the Bahia context).

In the case of the organizations from Bahia, the respondents' perception of the index to which the professionals amassed the set of competencies as

described in Sant'Anna's model (2002). Data unveiled that 65.3% of all respondents understand that the professionals of their companies have partially accumulated the competencies required for the performance of their functions. However, notably 22.4% of the respondents believe that their companies' professionals do not possess the competencies for the performance of their jobs at the required level, or have them at much lower level than that required.

### 4.3 Analysis of data referring to organizational modernity

This section presents the data obtained in relation to the index of organizational modernity found in the investigated institutions (cultural, political modernity and Modernity of administration and people management practices). An index close to the upper limit of the scales – 10 in the Minas Gerais case and 5 in the Bahia case – indicates that the professionals perceive that their organizations strongly have elements linked to cultural, administrative and political modernity.

As concerns the level of modernity of Minas Gerais' organizations, the data contained in Table 2 disclose a level that can be described as moderate. That is, considering the 10-point upper limit, the computed average in terms of respondent perception on the modernity of their respective companies is 5.8, an index lower than that seen in terms of required competencies. (average of 8.0). Therefore, it is possible to infer that, while there is a high level of requirements as concerns professional competencies, on the other

hand they note that their respective organizations are flawed as concerns several organizational modernity factors. Notably, this discrepancy between modernity and competencies is substantially higher in the case of Minas Gerais' organizations.

Reviewing each dimension of modernity, the political aspect – which included questions such as the decision-making process and autonomy – was the most critical in both empirical cases, demoting the lowest indices: 5.3 in 10 for Minas Gerais' companies and 3.3 in 5 in Bahia companies (see Table 3).

Concerning the dimension “Modernity of administration and people management practices”, differences are notable between the cases. In the organizations from Minas Geris, the respondents perceived to a higher extent the existence of modernity elements germane to organizational mission, objectives and goals (average of 7.0 in 10), as well as a focus upon results (average of 6.6 in 10), according to data from Table 4.

On the other hand, Bahia companies show a greater emphasis upon aspects associated to the awareness of employee role in the achievement of organizational objectives (average of 4.1 in 5) and upon a work

environment that facilitates the relationship among people, even at different hierarchical levels (average of 4.0 in 5). This outcome can be explained, among other reasons, by the prevalence of small-sized businesses in the universe of Bahia institutions participating in the investigation.

Concerning the aspects of “modernity of administration and management practices” that showed the least scores, a similar phenomenon was observed in both empirical cases. Notably, the existence of “evaluation systems that allow for performance differentiation” and “compensation systems that reward employees” were considered the least evident aspects in organizations from Minas Gerais and Bahia (as per Table 2). This finding represents a challenge from the people management viewpoint for the organizations investigated.

Concerning cultural modernity indicators, the highest average obtained in both investigated cases refers to the statement that organizations encourage individual initiative and responsibility (see Table 4). However, curiously, Table 5 demonstrates that the dissemination of this set of values has not yet been translated into human resource practices such as to

**Table 2.** Modernity of administration and people management practices.

Modernity of administration and people management practices	Minas [0.10]		Bahia [1.5]	
	Average	Median	Average	Median
The organization is strongly veered towards results	7.0	8.0	3.9	4.0
The organization's mission, objectives and goals are clearly defined	6.6	7.0	3.8	3.0
Overall, employees know what they should do to collaborate with the organization's objectives	6.5	7.0	4.1	4.0
The working environment facilitates the relationship among people, even from different hierarchical levels	6.5	7.0	4.0	4.0
The technology employed favors the interaction between people and areas	6.0	6.0	3.7	4.0
The organization's policies and practices encourage people to be well-informed and updated at all times.	5.9	6.0	3.4	3.0
The organization accepts behavioral diversity and respects individual differences	5.8	6.0	3.8	3.0
The main criteria for promotion are the individual's competency and productivity	5.7	6.0	4.0	4.0
The organization adequately balances the use of advanced technologies with the creativity of people	5.7	6.0	3.5	4.0
The organization's human resource policies and practices encourage personal and professional development	5.6	6.0	3.7	3.0
The organization adequately balances concerns with financial results, with people, and with innovation	5.5	6.0	3.6	3.0
Human resources policies and practices encourage people to be concerned with continuous learning	5.3	5.0	3.7	4.0
There is an evaluation system that allows the differentiation between good and bad performance	4.9	5.0	3.2	4.0
The organization's compensation system rewards acts of competency	4.6	5.0	3.4	4.0
<b>Index of Modernity</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>6.1</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>3.6</b>

Source: Authors (2013).



**Table 3.** Organizational modernity.

Organizational Modernity	Minas [0.10]		Bahia [1.5]	
	Average	Median	Average	Median
Cultural modernity	6.4	6.5	3.7	3.8
Modernity of administration and people management practices	5.8	6.1	3.7	3.6
Political modernity	5.3	5.4	3.3	3.8
<b>Index of Organizational Modernity</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>6.0</b>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>3.7</b>

Source: Authors (2013).

**Table 4.** Cultural modernity.

Cultural Modernity	Minas [0.10]		Bahia [1.5]	
	Average	Median	Average	Median
The organization encourages individual initiative and responsibility	6.7	7.0	3.9	4.0
The organization's internal climate encourages people to be in a continuous learning process in their work routines	6.4	7.0	3.7	4.0
The organization's internal climate encourages new, creative ideas	6.2	6.0	3.7	4.0
There is an encouraging climate in the organization for people to pursue their activities, seeking to exceed themselves	6.1	6.0	3.7	3.0
<b>Index of Modernity</b>	<b>6.4</b>	<b>6.5</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>3.8</b>

Source: Authors (2013).

**Table 5.** Correlation test among competency indicators.

Competency Indicators (A)	Competency Indicators (B)	Correlation
<b>Organizations from Bahia</b>		
Teamwork capacity	Innovation capacity	0.81
Capacity to commit to the organization's objectives	Innovation capacity	0.77
Capacity to learn new concepts and technologies quickly	Interpersonal relationship capacity	0.76
<b>Organizations from Minas Gerais</b>		
Innovation capacity	Creativity	0.72
Innovation capacity	Mastery of new technical knowledge	0.64
Interpersonal relationship capacity	Communication capacity	0.63

Source: Authors (2013).

enable more participatory, transparent, and decentralized decision-making processes in the political dimension.

In addition, Table 6 data indicate that the political modernity of companies from Minas Gerais and Bahia shows the lowest scores vis-à-vis the other modernity dimensions reviewed (modernity of administration and people management practices; cultural modernity), signaling that aspects such as a decentralized decision-making process and autonomy are major challenges for the organizations to trek towards “modernity”. These findings indicate that structures containing traits of centralization and hierarchical rigidity still prevail in the investigated organizations, despite efforts to encourage individual initiative and responsibility.

It is important to note that among the elements of political modernity, the lowest average, in both

empirical cases, was obtained by the statement: “the decision-making process in the organization is decentralized”.

Upon analyzing the data set presented in the tables, a significant gap is seen between the perception of organizational modernity and the demand for the investigated professional competencies. In other words, at the same time that organizations require increasingly higher competency levels, the competency-holders are faced with traditional management systems, scantily enablers of the development and application of the competencies being demanded. It is of no surprise, therefore, that findings from contemporary studies pinpoint the severe consequences of such situation, among them talent retention and workplace dissatisfaction scenarios (Sarsur et al., 2003).

**Table 6.** Political modernity.

Political Modernity	Minas [0.10]		Bahia [1.5]	
	Average	Median	Average	Median
As concerns the political aspect, the regimen prevailing in the organization can be characterized as democratic	5.5	6.0	3.8	4.0
The organization counts on participatory management systems that encourage people's initiatives and actions	5.5	6.0	3.2	4.0
The organization favors decision-making autonomy	5.4	5.0	3.3	3.0
Decision-making processes are participatory and transparent	5.3	5.0	3.5	4.0
The organization's decision-making process is decentralized	4.8	5.0	2.9	4.0
<b>Index of Modernity</b>	<b>5.3</b>	<b>5.4</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>3.8</b>

Source: Authors (2013).

#### 4.4 Linearity analysis

The purpose of linearity analysis is to verify the existence and intensity of the association among the variables of each proposed scale (among the competency and modernity indicators). For such, simple correlation was selected, also called Pearson's correlation coefficient, which, according to Aaker et al. (2004), measures the degree to which there is linear association between two interval variables.

Correlation may vary between [1 to -1], and a result close to 0 signifies that the two variables are not related. Values different from 0 and positive values indicate the existence of linear relationship, considered to be stronger as the computed coefficient nears 1 (Stevenson, 1986), negative correlation reflects a high-value association for the first variable and low for the second variable.

Evaluating the correlation findings among the competency indicators first, evidence is found that, in the Bahia case, there are, in general, stronger, positive relationships among the competency variables than found in Minas Gerais companies. Table 6 presents the three most significant correlations found in each case.

Among the variables showing a stronger association in the Bahia case (values greater than 0.7), notable are, firstly, team working capacity with innovation capacity (0.81) and, secondly, the capacity to commit to the organization's objectives, also with innovation capacity (0.77). Therefore, the data signal that the innovative process tends to be promoted when the organization encourages joint work and when the employees have a deep commitment with organizational goals.

In the case of companies from Minas Gerais, a strong correlation is seen between the innovation capacity and two variables: creativity (0.72) and the mastery of technical knowledge (0.72). This means, therefore, that there is a greater probability to innovate

in environments with creative individuals and with those who constantly seek new understandings.

As for weaker correlations (closer to 0) seen among the competency variables, notable are i) teamwork capacity and creativity, in the Bahia case (0.23); ii) capacity to learn new concepts and technologies quickly and emotional self-control, in the Minas Gerais case (0.24).

Concerning the second analysis in terms of correlation (among the modernity variables) higher indices were seen in the Minas Gerais case, in general, than in organizations from Bahia. Table 7 presents the three strongest correlations found in each case. Among the highest positive indices, notable is the strong association between the variable "HR policies and practices encourage people to be concerned with personal and professional development" with the variable "HR policies and practices encourage people to be concerned with continuous learning" (0.79). This finding strengthens the notion that personal and professional development is closely connected to the learning process as provided by the organizations.

An intense correlation between the indicators "the internal organization environment encourages people to learn continuously" and "the internal organization environment stimulates new, creative ideas" (0.83) was found in the companies from Minas Gerais calls for attention. It is no wonder that an environment propitious to learning should encourage innovations.

On the other hand, the weakest correlations between modernity variables were found with the following indicators: 1. The organization is strongly results-oriented and the organization accepts behavioral diversity and respects differences, in the Bahia context (0.11); 2. The organization's strategy, mission and objectives are clearly defined and the decision-making process is decentralized, in the Minas Gerais context (0.33).

**Table 7.** Correlation test among modernity indicators.

<b>Modernity Indicator (A)</b>	<b>Modernity Indicator (B)</b>	<b>Correlation</b>
<b>Organizations from Bahia</b>		
The organization's HR policies and practices encourage personal and professional development	HR policies and practices encourage people to be concerned with continuous learning	0.79
The organization's policies and practices encourage people to be well-informed and updated at all times	HR policies and practices encourage people to be concerned with continuous learning	0.76
The organization's decision-making process is decentralized	The organization favors decision-making autonomy	0.75
<b>Organizations from Minas Gerais</b>		
The organization's internal ambiance encourages people to be in a continuous learning process in their daily routines	The organization's internal ambiance stimulates new, creative ideas	0.83
There is a stimulating ambiance in the organization for people to pursue their activities, seeking to exceed themselves	The organization's internal ambiance stimulates new, creative ideas	0.81
The organization's HR policies and practices encourage personal and professional development	The organization's policies and practices encourage people to be well-informed and updated at all times	0.797

Source: Authors (2013).

## 5 Final considerations

The competency theme has become a constant in the agenda of academic and business discussions. Within the business scope, this discussion is justified by the growing need to act competently, given the globalization and increasingly fierce competitive processes (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1987). The new people management systems, still in the making, seek to adopt the competencies rationally with the purpose of overcoming prior models based on job and qualification notions, which reflect, above all, the background amassed by workers in the formal education system. The new model, in turn, seeks to value the set of understandings, skills and attitudes consolidated in the individuals career track. In the wake of fiercer competition and a greater supply of professionals to the marketplace, this may morph into great demands upon workers (Storey, 1995).

This article's findings confirm this tendency, to the extent that the demand for professional competencies in the organizations from Minas Gerais and Bahia were significant, although, paradoxically, the level at which the organizations adopt modern managerial models and attributes has proven to be quite low.

Notable, despite the perception of investigated professionals regarding the significant demand for the set of investigated competencies, is the agreement as concerns a greater emphasis upon those related to organizational performance, such as the capacity to yield results, which is akin to the notion of competency, construed as the capacity to mobilize multiple understandings, seeking to yield

effective results (Perrenoud, 2001). Also remarkable is the high perception of the demand for social and relational competencies, such as the communication, interpersonal relationships and teamwork capacities.

But, after all, are our organizations prepared for the required competencies? Have organizational contexts been favorable to the application and development of the set of required competencies? Seeking responses to these questions, empirical results indicate that, while organizations require high levels of competencies, on the other hand, professionals find traditional management models, scantily propitious for the required competencies. These findings corroborate indications from previous works, such as those developed by Sant'Anna (2002), and Kilimnik et al. (2004), regarding the presence of lower indices of management policies and practices (organizational modernity) compared to the levels of required professional competencies.

Also notable are the perceptions regarding the prevalence of scarcely participatory, transparent and decentralized decision-making processes. Despite the existence of discourses emphasizing individual initiative and responsibility, authoritarian and centralizing practices still prevail. These findings, added to the low modernity indices found with the political dimension, strengthen the thesis expounded by Leite (1996) that the now-fashionable modernization in this country comprises a process that, to these days, can be defined as "conservative modernity", suggesting the need for adoption, by companies, of managerial practices abreast of the new required professional profiles.

In summary, the findings strengthen the notion that the requirements for a new worker profile have not been followed, at the level preconized by such authors, by a new set of principles resting upon workers' autonomy and participation in the decision-making processes. The expectation remains, however, that, as a virtuous circle, the presence of professionals endowed with increasingly comprehensive and sophisticated competencies however dissatisfied with the gap between what is demanded of them and the counterparts in terms of modern managerial policies and practices may entail pressures for change capable of leading into true modernity, favoring the effective development of talents.

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