



PMO as a service:

A competence analysis through the francophone lens

PMO as a service:

Uma análise da competência pela lente francófona

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Abstract

Authors' Notes

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This article aims to link the French current of competence to investigate the competence mobilized by the Project Management Office as a Service professional when carrying out their work. A qualitative approach is used to explore such a little-studied phenomenon. Data was collected through documents and semi-structured interviews. Data was analyzed through grounded theory. The results show some competencies and attributes mobilized by the studied professionals to perform competently in real work situations where the context influences their performance. It ends by empirically contributing to the literature on Project Management Office insofar as the findings indicate possibilities to format customized training better directed to real working situations, where organizations can guide themselves to train their employees, who can enhance their employability.

Keywords: management and organization studies, competence, project management office, project management office as a service

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*PMO as a service:**uma análise da competência pela lente francófona***Resumo**

Este artigo tem como objetivo vincular a corrente francesa de competência para investigar a competência mobilizada pelo profissional do Project Management Office as a Service na execução de seu trabalho. Uma abordagem qualitativa é usada para explorar um fenômeno tão pouco estudado. Os dados foram coletados por meio de documentos e entrevistas semiestruturadas. Os dados foram analisados por meio da teoria fundamentada. Os resultados mostram algumas competências e atributos mobilizados pelos profissionais estudados para atuar com competência em situações reais de trabalho onde o contexto influencia seu desempenho. Termina contribuindo empiricamente para a literatura sobre Project Management Office na medida em que os achados indicam possibilidades de formatar treinamentos personalizados mais direcionados a situações reais de trabalho, onde as organizações podem se orientar para treinar seus funcionários, que podem aumentar sua empregabilidade.

Keywords: *management and organization studies, competence, project management office, project management office as a service*

Introduction

The North American, English, and French currents stood out in studies on competence. This research is theoretically anchored in the French-speaking lens (e.g., Le Boterf, 2003; Zarifian, 1999, 2001, 2003). This French approach broadened the debate on competence by bringing a constructivist view to the extent that it inserts the relevance of the role of the context and the need for mobilization when, until then, the debate was restricted to the concepts of the set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, which are explored in English and North American functionalist views (Fleury & Fleury, 2001). In this way, the expanded debate shifted the focus from qualifying for a prescribed job to focusing on the individual's accomplishments in a given context.

Studies with this theoretical current have been developed to expand understanding in different areas of knowledge in organizations (e.g., Campos et al., 2019; Takey & Carvalho, 2014). In step with the French current of competence, this research seeks to expand the field of study, specifically focusing on the work of the professional in the project management office (PMO) (cf. Karkukly, 2019; Martins & Martins, 2012).

Brazil follows the global trend towards outsourcing processes in organizations (Davenport, 2005; Saxena & Bharadwaj, 2009). In 2017, changes in the Brazilian labor legislation were

approved. For instance, law 13,429/2017 deals with the "unrestricted outsourcing" of any activity or process of an organization. Law 13,467/2017, or the labor reform law, deals with an even broader set of changes in labor legislation. Therefore, this study aims to investigate not only the work of the PMO professional but also this worker as an outsourced service provider, commonly referred to as "PMO as a service" (PMO AAS), delimiting the focus of the research even further.

The PMO aims to generate value for organizations (Bernstein, 2000). According to Bernstein (2000), the PMO brings benefits such as providing a better global view of available resources, better alignment with strategic objectives, and clarity regarding the tangible results of projects. According to Alexandrova et al. (2015), most studies involving PMOs address three topics: the justifications for implementing a PMO as a vector of innovation in the organization, the functions and activities of the PMO, and the steps for effective implementation of the PMO. Even though the PMO is the subject of many studies (Desouza & Evaristo, 2006), more needs to be addressed about the issue of the project office professional as an outsourced service provider (Karkukly, 2019) or PMO as a service. This is a new phenomenon, and it is understood that further studies are needed.

In this context, this research seeks to relate the theme of competence in the French current to the work of the project office professional in a work context delimited by "as a service." Considering the relevance of the context's role and the need for mobilization and action, the research problem was defined as follows: How does the PMO AAS professional mobilize competence in carrying out his work activities?

As a general objective, this article aims to link the French current of competence to investigate the competence mobilized by the professional Project Management Office as a Service when carrying out their work. Specifically, activities and aspects of the routine context of PMO AAS professionals are characterized, unforeseen complex situations are identified, aspects of contextual communication are mapped, and the products, services, or results created or modified where there was the mobilization of competence are analyzed.

The literature review shows that PMO is typically approached with a functionalist perspective, prioritized more as an organizational structure than an active professional. Conversely, this study adds to the field by approaching the theme aiming at the work of the professional who acts as a PMO as a service using a constructivist perspective, as is the theoretical

lens on competence in the French current, in which the focus is on the worker and his relationships with the context. Moreover, this investigation introduces the French current of competence for professionals and researchers interested in PMO.

Empirically, in addressing PMO activities and how the professional mobilizes competence in a given work situation, this study shows the PMO professional's value for the organization's processes and businesses. It can also contribute to the development plan, both for the professional and the organization, by providing training courses better directed at work situations and day-to-day events, allowing workers to increase their professionalism and employability.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework is organized into two thematic axes. First, important conceptual and thematic aspects of PMO are addressed. Then, the notion of competence is discussed. Competencies are assumed to be professional content and attributes, and competence is a successful action. Having competence is being successful in carrying out the work, and knowing how to mobilize competencies is a professional capacity.

PMO concepts

Organizations must manage their projects well. They operate in a more complex multi-project context, where products, services, or results are implemented simultaneously and involve several actors. Projects are everywhere in the organization, including between organizations. The project management office (PMO) and the professionals who work in it must know how to manage this complex multi-project environment.

This study considers the definitions of the Project Management Institute (PMI) established for the acronym PMO. According to this organization, the PMO is the project management office or the professional who works there (PMI, 2013). According to PMI (2017, p. 48), the PMO is an organizational structure that standardizes project governance processes and facilitates sharing resources, methodology, tools, and techniques. The PMO's primary function is to support project managers. This support can happen through project guidance and supervision, or it can be supported by identifying and supplying methodologies and tools suitable for a specific project. It supports monitoring compliance with governance in the organization's projects and managing

resources shared between different projects (PMI, 2017). PMO performs functions related to managing projects, programs, or portfolios, which are defined according to the specific needs of its clients and, consequently, of each organization, making it unique in its structure and configuration (Pinto, 2016, p. 2).

According to Aubry et al. (2010), the PMO is a dynamic multilevel process anchored in specific organizational changes. A PMO often transits through different structures (and typologies) because it is a natural change process. The activities or services performed by the PMO, therefore, also vary. In a survey with 500 professionals in several countries, Hobbs and Aubry (2007) identified 27 activities or functions of the PMO and listed them according to the importance given by the professionals. As a result, this survey shows that the most critical activity is “reporting the status of projects to superiors,” with 83%. Following came the activities of ‘developing and implementing standard methodology,’ ‘monitoring and controlling project performance,’ and ‘developing staff competence, including training,’ with 76%, 65%, and 65% of importance, respectively. For Hobbs and Aubry (2007), these activities can also be grouped by affinity, forming five groups of functions, which are sequenced according to the level of importance: (1) monitoring and control of project performance; (2) development of project management skills and methodology; (3) managing multiple projects; (4) strategic management; (5) and organizational learning.

About the organizations that offer the PMO as a service, we can find characteristics and models that cover most of the PMO activities identified in the studies by Hobbs and Aubry (2007), and this list of activities (services) can be customized for each client. Organizations can provide a structure that encompasses services related to project governance, assuming responsibilities for methodology, metrics, reports, and budget of projects and portfolios. They also offer the professional or team responsible for deliveries and other resources such as automated management tools and software. These organizations can provide customized solutions by project or by a fixed-term contract.

Process outsourcing is constantly growing, given the speed at which technical changes occur in organizational activities (Davenport, 2005; Saxena & Bharadwaj, 2009). Opting for this strategy requires substantial investments in systems and specialist support (Martins & Martins, 2012). Martins and Martins (2012) sought to understand what determines the decision-making

mechanisms related to adopting outsourcing PMO services when they are linked to the organization's skills, the relevance of a PMO, and its alignment with organizational competencies. The authors discuss the possibilities of outsourcing the PMO operation in Brazil, identifying the conditions under which subcontracting the processes of a PMO becomes viable and the successful strategies obtained by the organization with the PMO AAS. For these authors, it is unlikely that the PMO is positively related to the culture of external services used by the organization and the use of outsourcing to operate the PMO. At a mining company in South Africa, Karkukly (2019) explored the outsourcing of PMO functions to improve organizational performance. Through a case study featuring both a contracting organization and a contractor specializing in PMO services, Karkuly's (2019) study has identified five different outsourced functions. The author suggests that PMO outsourcing positively impacts project performance by standardizing methodology and governance over the organization's projects. However, such studies focus on the PMO as an organizational structure rather than the work of the professional acting as a PMO.

Competence for the French current

The French approach to competence brings a constructivist view that contrasts with the Anglo-American functionalist view. For Fleury and Fleury (2001), the French current had broadened the debate on competence by inserting the relevance of the role of context and the need for mobilization when, until then, the discussion was restricted to the concepts of the set of knowledge, skill, and attitude. The hegemonic approach addresses the worker attributes as prerequisites or qualifications for a given job without showing whether or how the workers with similar characteristics but unique ways of performing used these competencies (attributes) to accomplish work (Sandberg, 2000).

For Zarifian (2001, p. 68), competence is an individual decision, which is assumed or not, depending on the conditions given to workers in the work they are involved in. So, they act and take the initiative guided by the context (Zarifian, 2001). Understanding the historical context is essential to understanding the changes that work and organizations undergo and their competence. In this regard, Zarifian (2001) draws attention to three fundamental concepts: event, communication, and service.

Events are unexpected and disturb the daily organizational routine, making the organization unable to self-regulate itself (Zarifian, 2001, p. 41). Professionals interact and act to solve problems that may arise from sudden failures in quality or a lack of resources due to new market demands or government legislation. Events such as these can have negative or positive meanings. For Zarifian (2001), this individual's action takes place in three moments, generating learning: before the event, when there is already a specific expectation about possibilities; during the event, when it comes to practical action for a solution; and after the event, when individuals have their moment of analysis of what happened. The skills to solve the event depend on the individual inserted in a given situation and is outside the job.

Communicating is establishing a mutually comprehensible framework and solid foundation of dedication that will ensure the triumphant execution of collaborative endeavors (Zarifian, 2001, p. 45). It is through communication that organizations deal with events, making this element essential. Communicating involves others' problems and obligations and mapping the network of interrelated actions (Zarifian, 2001, p. 46). Communication is a central organizational point that articulates events, for it is in these moments that the need to talk and communicate arises. Service refers to the customer-user problem and how the worker's result of its delivery, whether material or immaterial, brings possible solutions to this problem. Workers produce services, modifying the activity of others (e.g., clients and users) (Zarifian, 2001, p. 48). It is necessary to know the need to provide a quality service that transforms the client-user's living or activity conditions.

Understanding workers' competence as taking the initiative and assuming responsibility in the face of professional situations with which they are faced, Zarifian (2001) conceptualizes 'taking action' as a responsible and ethical activity that creates something new based on the worker's experience and knowledge of that type of situation (see also Fleury & Fleury, 2001; Le Boterf, 2017). The idea of taking action allows Zarifian (2001) to identify moments of action, analysis, learning, and dialogue that are neither prescribed nor linear. For taking action, Zarifian (2001) claims workers need to have a 'practical understanding' of the event, which requires prior knowledge combined with knowing how to use the expertise and adjustments considering particular situations. The practical understanding is facilitated by information technologies that have expanded communication between professionals, even at a distance, contributing to taking

action and collaborating in a network of events (Zarifian, 2001, p. 63). However, for mobilizing networks, the co-responsibility of the network is necessary. The individual alone is less and less competent. Accordingly, workers need to be able to gather complementary resources, locally or remotely (Le Boterf, 2017). Individuals mobilize the skills of a network to complement their actions (see also Fleury & Fleury, 2001).

Therefore, competence is manifested in events that occur at work (Zarifian, 2001; 2003). Professionals need to mobilize their competence to manage and order what Le Boterf (2003, p. 24-37) calls ‘complex professional situations,’ which are specific, singular, and unprecedented, for they change under the influence of the evolution of technology, economic, and organizational factors. For Le Boterf (2003), the situation in which competence manifests itself is complex, as it is always unprecedented, covered by uncertainties and constant change.

Competence lies in the professional's ‘knowing what to do’ in complex situations (Le Boterf, 2003). For Le Boterf (2003), knowing how to act is knowing even how to anticipate a situation, i.e., doing what is prescribed and what is not explicitly described or cannot be predicted. It involves initiative and risk, and it requires a decision. Moreover, that decision may be to accept the situation and not act. Knowing how to act means taking the initiative (Zarifian, 2001), knowing how to act responsibly and get involved (Fleury & Fleury, 2001; Le Boterf, 2003), and having, combining, and transposing internal (knowledge and skills) and environmental (tools, data and relationship network) resources and knowing how to mobilize them to face a situation or deliver a project (Le Boterf, 2003).

According to the French current, only some studies link up with competence to investigate the skills a PMO AAS professional mobilizes when carrying out his work and in the relationship with his contractor. For instance, Campos et al. (2019) addressed the importance of competence and its practical use for business development in organizations through semi-structured interviews with supply managers in the Brazilian supermarket sector. The authors found that the supply chain management (SCM) managers interviewed pay more attention to general competencies, such as cost/budget knowledge or relationship management, than specific competencies, such as purchasing management, risk management, or the management of international logistics processes. They also found that the level of use given to all listed skills was lower than the level of importance. Takey and Carvalho (2014), in turn, researched project manager competencies based on four

different categories: (1) project management processes, (2) personnel, (3) technique, and (4) context and business. These authors used French and American concepts of individual competence, such as those brought by Fleury and Fleury (2001), to guide their work of mapping project manager competencies. The authors end up creating a method to map these skills. In line with these efforts, this study investigates the competence mobilized by the PMO AAS when carrying out its work and in the relationship with its contractor. The methodology is explained next.

Materials and methods

Qualitative research was chosen, as it seeks to explain social phenomena from an internal view of the phenomenon (Flick, 2007). For Flick (2007), the qualitative nature allows for analyzing individuals' experiences related to day-to-day professional practices (Flick, 2007). Qualitative methods allow researchers to unpack increasingly complex challenges management and organizations face (Bansal, Smith & Vaara, 2018). This research explores a little-researched phenomenon (Creswell, 2009; Gray, 2009), the PMO AAS. Thus, document analysis and interviewing experts about what is happening are ways to explore a new phenomenon (Gray, 2009).

Data collection

This research uses document analysis and interviews as data production methods. The study could access documentary data drawn from the PMOs and their clients by investigating the competence mobilized by the PMO AAS when carrying out its work and in the relationship with its contractor. Reports, e-mails, and routine documents offered an additional path of investigation. It also uses semi-structured interviews to understand subjects' day-to-day issues from their perspectives (Campos et al., 2019; Kvale, 2007).

To select the interviewees, this study initially aimed to identify the first PMO professionals among those belonging to the membership of the Project Management Institution in Brazil and, subsequently, made use of the "snowball" strategy (Geddes *et al.*, 2018) to achieve what is

necessary for theoretical saturation. One professional could indicate another, and so on, covering different economic sectors. For example, contractor D32AF, leader of a PMO in the public sector, referred PMO professionals to AAS M36AM and D49AM, and the latter indicated F50AM.

Table 1 summarizes essential data from each interview. It presents the economic sectors of the contracting organizations where the PMO AAS carried out its work and their positioning within the organization's structure, that is, the sector, management, or board to which the PMO was linked and carried out its work. It also shows the type of PMO according to its classification regarding the degree of control and influence over projects.

Each professional had their real name anonymized, following the rules of name, age, and gender. For the name, a character refers to the initial letter of the professional's name. For age, three characters were used, the first two being the age numbers and the third referring to the word "years." Finally, a character for gender, which, in this research, is found only with "F" for female and "M" for male. For example, D26AF could hypothetically refer to a professional named Dora, 26 years old and female. This ensures proper secrecy for the interviewee and, for the reader, allows data to be linked to a professional profile. Table 1 shows that the researchers interviewed professionals in the role of PMO AAS and professionals who hired the outsourced. With this option, critical aspects of the work context of the PMO AAS professionals involved in the study were discussed in this research. Table 1 also presents other details of the professional profile of the interviewee, such as higher education, specialization in the area of projects, and time of experience in the function.

Table 1.

Profile Of The Respondent Subject

PROFESSIONAL PMO AAS	GENDER	AGE	FORMATION	SPECIALIZATION IN PROJECTS	EXPERIENCE IN THE ROLE	SIMULTANEOUS PROJECTS	LOCATION IN THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE	CUSTOMER'S ECONOMIC SECTOR	INTERVIEW DATE
D26AF	F	26	Electrical Eng.	No	1 year and 8 months	1	Technology Management	Mining	02/09/2021
C36AM	M	36	Chemical Eng.	Incomplete Postgraduate degree	1 year	15	Building Maintenance Department	Financial	03/20/2021
P36AF	F	36	Information system	PMP	1 year and 6 months	7	Business Development	Automotive	03/23/2021
R41AF	F	41	Management	Software Project Management	1 year and 5 months	16	Governance Management	Energy	04/08/2021
M36AM	M	36	Electrical Eng.	Postgraduate degree	1 year and 7 months	80	Busyness Development Director	Sanitation Public	04/09/2021
D49AM	M	49	Electrical Eng.	Postgraduate degree	2 years and 6 months	35	Busyness Development Director	Public Sector	04/19/2021
F50AM	M	50	Electrical Eng.	PMP, PMSP, PGMP, Risks	8 years	10	Project and Process Management	Energy	04/19/2021

Source: Prepared by the author.

Table 2 shows that among the companies contracting and contracting, there are small or large companies of national or foreign origin operating in the Brazilian or international market. Clients are from the public or private sector.

Table 2:

Characterization Of Companies (AAS Relationship)

Context	Business sector	Country of origin	Type of company	Management control	# employees	Operating market	Event Place
CONTRACTING COMPANY							
1	Mining	South Africa	Open Capital	Private	10,000 to 100,000	International	Minas Gerais
2	Automotive	Italy	Open Capital	Private	More than 100,000	International	Minas Gerais
3	Oil and Gas	Brazil	Open Capital	Public	10,000 to 100,000	International	Rio de Janeiro
4	Economic Development	Brazil	Open Capital	Public	1 to 1,000	Brazil	Rio de Janeiro
5	Energy distribution	Brazil	Open Capital	Public	10,000 to 100,000	International	Minas Gerais
HIRED COMPANY							
1	Consulting and auditing	UK	Closed capital	Private	More than 100,000	International	Minas Gerais
2	Technology solutions and strategic services	Brazil	Closed capital	Private	1 to 1,000	Brazil	Minas Gerais
3	Consulting, outsourcing, and corporate education	USA	Closed capital	Private	1 to 1,000	International	Rio de Janeiro
4	Management and governance for the public sector	Brazil	Closed capital	Private	1 to 1,000	Brazil	Rio de Janeiro
5	Consulting, auditing, IT, Software, and outsourcing	Brazil	Closed capital	Private	10,000 to 100,000	International	Minas Gerais

Source: Prepared by the author.

The interviews were conducted via videoconference using the Google Meets platform from February to April 2021. The average duration of each was 40 minutes. The interviews were conducted according to the best practices suggested by Kvale (2007), with a briefing phase before

the beginning of the recording (audio recording) to explain the research objectives to the interviewee and the request for authorization for recording. This authorization is formalized by the respondents in the audio recording and through electronic correspondence to safeguard the study from an ethical point of view. Next, the interview followed according to the prepared script. Then, it ended with a debriefing, where the interviewee could present additional considerations or talk about the experience lived during the interview. The script (Appendix A and B) was also prepared following the guidelines of Kvale (2007) and based on the specific objectives of the research and the theoretical assumptions of the French lens of competence.

Data analysis

This research was guided by openness to experiences and grounded in action, in step with grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The assumptions of grounded theory were mainly followed by the data analysis technique (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Gibbs, 2009). The interviews were transcribed, and preparing the corpus was the next step. After transcription, the data were revised, and the text was kept with grammatical errors and language defects. The audio and text files were archived in the author's Google Drive cloud.

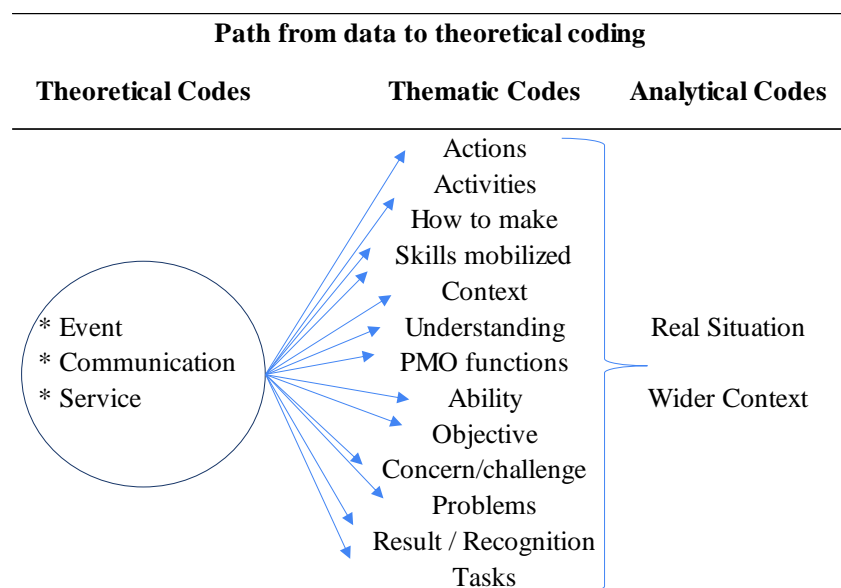
Next, the coding and categorization process began. This research was guided by codification and categorization techniques (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Gibbs, 2009). The encoding stage organizes and controls the data (Gibbs, 2009). For this research, we opted for the open coding strategy, which is based on data and without any pre-conceived list of codes. It was also decided to carry out the line-by-line coding type. Therefore, the codes emerged according to the sequence of the interview. To start this step, the descriptive codes were inserted into an Excel spreadsheet where the categorical grouping could be organized. The Excel file created followed the following column structure: (1) interviewee's codename; (2) location according to the text line; (3) descriptive code; (4) categorization/grouping; and (5) text excerpt for quick contextualization.

The next step was grouping the interview's descriptive codes based on a thematic categorization, having 'event,' 'communication,' and 'service' as theoretical codes, the first data abstraction process. Thus, the meanings of expressions were analyzed, and different hypotheses for a given descriptive codification were explored. After going back and forth between data collection and analysis processes, more than four hundred descriptive codes in the textual data

were identified and organized in an Excel spreadsheet. That is how 13 thematic codes were created during the analytical process, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1.

Theoretical Alignment



Source: Elaborated by the author.

From that moment on, another abstraction effort created a new grouping by affinity, named analytical coding, in this research. This process made the analytical codes ‘wider context’ and ‘real situation’ the bases for how this research structured the exposition of the results. These codes served as a bridge to relate a theoretical alignment with the creation, when possible, of an essential theoretical codification for the discussion about competence (see Figure 1).

Presentation of results

Situations experienced by PMO AAS professionals in five different economic sectors

The analytical codification denominated here as ‘real situation’ comes from the thematic codification entitled ‘mobilized competence.’ In the French current, competence occurs in the professional's action in the face of a specific situation. For this reason, complete excerpts of an

actual situation experienced by the interviewed PMO AAS professionals are presented below. These data are organized by economic sectors to which each contracting organization belongs.

Mining: An organizational restructuring and its impact on the project schedule

In an actual situation in which some competences highlighted by the respondents were fundamental for delivering the service, the professional PMO AAS D29AF presented a sudden situation of restructuring sectors that impacted the project she was working on. In her words:

Recently, the company made an organizational change that divided a certain department into smaller groups, allocated some departments to other management, and affected the entire pool of resources. Then it is tough because we, as PMO, only have the role of alerting about the impact of this on the projects, but we do not have any action, so it is always challenging when this happens. [...] It impacted because the activities started to be delayed. Because in the new department organization, some people were overloaded until the transition was made. So we had to manage many conflicts of interest and negotiate with customers to accept late deliveries. However, if it were to define communication as the main skill that helped in this conflict (D29AF).

Automotive: An unexpected demand and the action of the PMO AAS to develop personnel competence

An unexpected demand for training in OKR (Objective-key Results) and design thinking methodologies for executing the strategy and solving problems led the outsourced professional P39AF to act in the sector in question. In this case, training should be facilitated for the contracting party's human resources (HR) team, specifically for analysts in the business partner roles (HR BP – Human Resources Business Partners). Furthermore, this training deals with themes that the professional PMO AAS did not master then, which could not have been foreseen either, which made her engage with the other's problems and act.

If I know that problem, I try to help in the best way possible and, many times. Like last year, the HR area came to us as a PMO for us to provide design thinking and OKR training for the staff from HR to HR BP. Then, our area needed to learn about this. So, I ran after it; I took training on this subject, read articles, studied about it, and attended lectures and webinars. Even knowing that it was not, we could deny it, saying, "No, there is no person here with that knowledge; let us not do it," However, I tried to look for it in the different ways I said. Then we gave them the training. It was a success; sixty people from HR took the training in two groups (P39AF).

Oil and gas: status report and particular demand from top management

In an unexpected situation faced by the professional PMO AAS F50AM with his client in the oil and gas sector, the professional was asked to prepare a presentation on the performance of the organization's projects. This presentation should last one hour and report on thirty organization projects. However, in the scope of work of the PMO AAS, there were only ten projects, and twenty were unknown to the professional and the sector where he was positioned. This event became more complex as the results, to be communicated by the PMO AAS, would even interfere with the definition of employee bonuses. In this example of an actual situation, professional F50AM shared the following.

They presented me with a need at the end of last year: they would have to present about 30 projects to the top management, like a year-end meeting, to verify goals were met. This would even influence the bonus internally for managers, so they were concerned, "How can we organize ourselves to collect this information and present it in a way that this is understood in a one-hour meeting with senior management? So, in this portfolio of approximately 30 projects, only ten were already being monitored by the PMO. [...] So, how will we collect this information from even those twenty that the PMO is not monitoring and package and make this presentation to the top management? So, it was at that time that communication competency was critical. Their internal analyst and I had to present this need to those other project managers who did not even know about the PMO, so they had to be contacted to collect this information for this management meeting. So, this aspect of communication and collaboration was vital because of that. The conciseness in the presentation of these results had to be done, so this last aspect that I mentioned, the ability to consolidate information and

present it to discharge management, I had to create with them a model of a single slide, a single report, a slide just for each project. This provided the information that would be necessary and sufficient for the top management to have a fair understanding of what was happening on that project in terms of the program, in terms of risks, and even in terms of cost as well, and knowing that, they could conclude whether that project achieved the strategic goal and how the bonus distribution for that project would be. This communication capacity was significant in this situation, convincing these project managers by providing this information and collaborating with them. In some cases, we even had to go deeper into the project, understand and put our hands in the mass, and this more hard capacity of you, from scattered and detailed information, to consolidate in a group of summarized information for high management. [...] It was a little project, a schedule to do this until all the reports were prepared, validated by the project manager, validated by the manager of the project manager, who played the role of sponsor, so that these managers of the project manager project to present to top management the performance of those 30 or so projects that were selected. That would be an example (F50AM).

Economic development company: facing resistance to the implementation of a standard methodology

The PMO AAS D49AM mobilized competence to overcome a difficult situation in the client organization, where it needed to ensure the adherence of professionals resistant to the project methodology.

I have many examples of empathy, of putting myself in the other's shoes. [...] I had a situation in a project where the leader was tough and resistant. He liked "doing" a lot, going out and doing things, and his affliction came a lot from his charging for time. He was charged for a matter of time.

Moreover, I told him this, and it turned out that I was the only person who could work with this guy, and he always wanted me to be there for his projects. So, people would say: "You put your hand on his head." It is not that I put my hand on his head, [...]. I, in his place, would also be desperate to deliver. Furthermore, we started talking, and I showed him. I had to be patient. We ended up developing a friendship, a trust, where we were becoming more flexible until when he saw it, he was adherent, within his rhythm, his way, but delivering as it had to be, with the necessary artifacts, filled out correctly, within the planning deadline and such [...] When we reached a knot, he was desperate, "It is not to despair; it will happen. Nobody thinks

it will not happen. This is foreseen. At some point, you will have these paths there, kind of a stone in the middle of the path, you will have to remove it if it were easy, you would not put it, you would put someone else, take anyone, and put it, but it is necessary to have your energy on it, so, it is expected, we are going to remove it". Then we went there, talked, climbed, we removed. [...] He noticed that when I said "trust me"... I said "man, trust me, if it goes bad, it will go bad for you, and it will go bad for me, my roof is very more glass than yours, look at the risk I am taking," and he managed the long job.

Was it easy? No. Was it hard work? Exhausting, but ultimately, it happened. As? Empathy, because his pain is that no one understood that he had an impossible deadline, that he had 20 projects behind him, plus 300,000 of the routine, and they wanted him to do many useless things. It was his pain. He was right. It was true. I am not going to argue with him. He did not know how to handle it all. It is maturity. It is a lack of organization. His pain is that he was drowned. Someone threw the lifesaver for him with the rope so you could pull and tow him. Moreover, empathy has already worked for several people (D49AM).

Energy distribution: communicating the correct information about project performance

Professional R41AF, acting on behalf of her public sector client, detailed an event in which she had to ensure correct information in the project status report.

In the status report, we have, for example, the status of the project, where we reference them in color, so green if it is on time, requested cost; orange if it has a deviation but already has a proposal to resume the schedule; and red if he is, in fact, late. So what happens often? Project leaders try to mask these statuses, not to show red status. So, the red status is undesirable because it is always the weekly meeting report and the focus of discussion. So, the primary skill in this context is you. With constant follow-up and monitoring, you will identify and help these project leaders to make the correct status, with the proper explanations, and make the meeting as fluid as possible, without any incidents [...] So, precisely about these project statuses, they are where I most apply non-violent communication, conflict management, negotiation skills. Why? Because leaders want to avoid exposing themselves or the development teams, it is hard not to generate stress from a project status in this context. When you present a

status that is not so good, the project leader wants to mask that so that the teams all succeed in the projects. What is the role of the PMO? It is to ensure that this project is going well because the objective of the PMO is to protect all the projects for the organization, not each person. So what do I have to do? I have to make sure the status the person is submitting is the correct project status. How do I do that? Accompanying in detail and communicating with everyone so that this is accomplished. So this is the everyday situation. This is the situation that just happened, for example. One of the projects had an orange status because it had already been replanned, but the replanning still needed to be fulfilled, so it was, in fact, late and no longer orange because the planning had already been broken [...] I had to persuade the project lead to put the correct status on the meeting for the presentation; why There it was not a project by the project leader, it was a project from the PMO portfolio, where the company is interested in those correct deadlines, and not in the deadline that I want to pass [...] Using non-violent communication, assertive communication, one to one... communication techniques (R41AF).

Discussion

Skills mobilized: Event, communication, and service

This research discussed competence based on the analytical coding called ‘real situation,’ in which PMO AAS professionals reported events. Competence manifests itself in the specific situation where the action occurs (Le Boterf, 2003, p. 37). Competence occurs in work events (Zarifian, 2001; 2003). The theoretical alignment takes place on this from the elements of event, communication, and service that Zarifian (2001) assigns. Table 3 mainly illustrates the events in each situation and production context.

Table 3:
Situations and Events

SITUATION	Context 1	Context 2	Context 3	Context 4	Context 5
	Mining	Automotive	Oil and Gas	Economic development	Energy distribution
EVENTS	Organizational restructuring and its impact on project schedules.	An unforeseen demand and the action of the PMO ASS to develop personnel competence.	Status report and the particular demand of senior management	Facing resistance to implementing standard methodology.	Communicating the correct information about project performance.

Source: Prepared by the author.

Next, each situation is discussed from the French perspective of competence without losing sight of the importance of context in the work routine.

Context 1: Organizational restructuring and its impact on the project schedule

In the context of organizational change, which hurt the progress of projects, the chemical engineer and professional PMO AAS ‘knew how to act’ (Le Boterf, 2003) and mobilized skills to deliver her work. By reassessing the risks arising from this organizational restructuring and warning about the impacts of this on the project, the professional contributed to an understanding of the interdependence of actions. It evidenced that the change in the resource pool impacted the project. By acting to negotiate delays in deliveries and conflicts, the professional promoted the expansion of the common understanding of that situation to other actors, including the project's clients. Hence, conflict of interest management and negotiations with customers to accept some late deliveries were necessary, as reported by D29AF.

By characterizing part of the communication aspects present in the situation in question, it is possible to perceive the importance of this element for the mutual understanding of the event and the service of this PMO AAS working relationship. Regarding the service, the professional reassessed risks and changes and then handed over the service of monitoring and controlling project performance. To do so, skills such as conflict management, negotiation, and communication must be mobilized so the client would accept this change in project delivery.

Context 2: An unforeseen demand and the action of the PMO AAS to develop personal competence

According to the perspectives of professional P39AF, the unpredictability of this event makes perfect sense considering the objective of the PMO AAS and the most critical routine activities. During such an event, the professional knew how to engage, learn (Le Boterf, 2003), and act (Le Boterf, 2003). Participant P39AF took the initiative (Zarifian, 2001) to meet the demand made by the client organization.

In addition to the contracting party's HR demand for the PMO and its acceptance, professional P39AF reports other communication elements, such as actors involved, physical artifacts, sources of information, and knowledge transmission through carrying out the training required by the client. Moments of action, learning, and dialogue combined to characterize a complex situation where the professional mobilized competence. Providing training based on multiple forms of research was necessary (P39AF).

The result of this relationship was the modification of the client's activity conditions. By providing training in design thinking and OKR methodologies to 60 internal professionals in the human resources sector, the client organization now has this expertise in its internal staff. To deliver the service of developing competence, including training, the PMO AAS took the initiative (Zarifian, 2001), knew how to engage, and knew how to learn (Le Boterf, 2003), ending up mobilizing competencies such as the ability to learn quickly and the ability to deliver capacity building training.

Context 3: Status report and the particular demand from senior management

The outsourced professional was unexpectedly asked to prepare an hour-long presentation on the current performance of thirty of the organization's projects. Of the thirty projects, only ten were part of the scope of the PMO. Twenty projects needed to be mapped and follow the same management methodology. This event became even more complex, as the results to be communicated by the PMO AAS would even interfere with the definition of bonuses for the company's employees.

Some aspects of communication, according to Zarifan (2001), are present in this event: by mobilizing a network of other project managers whom they did not even know and who did not

realize the PMO, together with the communication carried out through the creation of a schedule and a process for validating project information with the project managers and then with the managers of these project managers, moments of action, analysis and dialogue faced by the professional PMO AAS were characterized, which served as shared memory, of mutual understanding about the interdependence, complementarity and solidarity of actions (Zarifian, 2001). For this, professionals must know how to integrate multiple knowledge and combine resources (Le Boterf, 2003). Professionals need to mobilize external resources because they are less competent alone (Le Boterf, 2017).

Every effort made in this process until its delivery, in communicating the status of these thirty projects during the year-end meeting, also generated learning moments. The status report of one page per project is evident as a prominent material artifact used for communication with senior management. However, there were others, including a specific service schedule to be carried out by the PMO AAS, as the demand was treated as 'a small project', as the professional F50AM reported.

Finding a material artifact that the PMO AAS client can absorb is possible. Delivering the status report of 30 projects so the organization's management understands its position in project performance is essential in this relationship. The organization obtained other products from this relationship, such as a status report model with just one slide (OPR – One-page report), with brief information allowing decision-making.

As presented, this result changed the client's working conditions. This material artifact, the slide on a page summarizing a project's performance, can be absorbed and used in future opportunities, becoming part of the company's organizational assets. In this event, twenty of the thirty projects were not monitored, and the professional, as he acted, allowed the organization to benefit from this expansion of the standardization of the methodology, with greater capillarity of good project management practices and, consequently, could, including increasing their maturity in this area. Power of synthesis, collaboration, and communication were the skills mobilized by the PMO AAS in the complex situation faced, a report that occurred in the oil and gas sector.

Context 4: Facing resistance to implementing a standard methodology

Participant D49AF came across a professional from the contracting company who was reluctant to accept the project management methodology that the PMO AAS was tasked with carrying out. As reported in the moments of dialogue between the PMO AAS and its client, the project leader created an environment for dialogue by understanding the client's pain. Gradually, these dialogues generated the necessary trust in the outsourced-client relationship, contributing to a change in the behavior of the professional and his client, allowing him to adhere his project to the methodology the PMO AAS needed to implement. This alignment of understandings is an aspect of communication brought by Zarifian (2001) as an essential part of understanding the specific situation in which competence mobilization occurs. To ensure adherence to the project methodology in a client organization of the Rio de Janeiro public sector, as an economic development company, the outsourced professional mobilized skills such as empathy, flexibility, and patience to deliver this service.

Context 5: Communicating correct information on project performance

There were moments of dialogue between the project leader and the professional PMO AAS R41AF at the event. These moments were followed by moments of action, such as carrying out the analyses necessary for monitoring the project. As reported, the AAS professional acted responsibly and ethically (Le Boterf, 2017). He presented his co-responsibility as a PMO in that leader's project, and through assertive, non-violent communication and mobilizing other communication techniques, he was able to influence the leader to present the project's situation, the delay situation in red on the status report.

Communication was also the core competence mobilized by the professional PMO AAS R41AF to successfully deliver the status report to the top management of its client in the energy distribution sector. Participant R41AF acted ethically and used assertive, nonviolent, and one-on-one communication techniques (Le Boterf, 2017).

Joint analysis of situations

Among the thirteen competencies (attributes) mobilized in these five situations faced by each PMO AAS, communication stands out among the others as it was mobilized in three. Communication, collaboration and the ability to synthesize and influence were fundamental skills for reporting project performance to senior management. Empathy, flexibility, and patience were essential to delivering two services: developing and implementing standard methodology and providing guidance to project managers. As for monitoring and controlling the performance of the projects, the competencies mobilized by the respondents were communication, negotiation, and conflict management. Moreover, finally, to develop personnel competence, including training, the competencies mobilized in the specific situation were the ability to learn quickly and provide training.

The context in which the professional PMO AAS P36AF delivered the service of developing personnel competence, including training, draws attention when it differs from the others because it is a service that was not part of the most important activities of that professional's routine, which would be the activities of governance over projects and project planning with the areas. This fact is present in other contexts, as Table 3 illustrates. Another point concerns the outsourced professional's perspectives regarding the objectives of the PMO, which, according to her and illustrated by chart 8, corresponded to providing support to project managers (PM). The two points raised contribute to the thesis that nothing can be prescribed or foreseen in work situations. Another issue that draws attention happens in contexts 1 and 5. However, acting as a PMO AAS is challenging. Some see PMO AAS professionals as allies, others as enemies because they point deviations (D26AF), or people do not know the support they want (R41AF). PMO AAS professionals see themselves as allies of the client (D26AF) that give visibility to work (R41AF).

Table 4 again presents the specific event for each of the five work contexts found in the research and adds the elements of communication and service performed by each of the PMO AAS professionals, in line with Zarifian's (2001) contributions. It ends by presenting the competences that were mobilized in each of the contexts.

Table 4.
Competences Mobilized

REAL SITUATION	CONTEXT 1 - MINING	CONTEXT 2 - AUTOMOTIVE	CONTEXT 3 - OIL AND GAS	CONTEXT 4 - ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	CONTEXT 5 - ENERGY DISTRIBUTION
EVENT	Organizational restructuring and its impact on project schedule	An unforeseen demand and the action of the PMO AAS to develop personnel competence	Status report and the particular demand of senior management	Facing resistance to implementing standard methodology.	Communicating the correct information about project performance
COMMUNICATION	Impact alert: Negotiation of late deliveries	Request and acceptance of demand; Sources of obtaining knowledge; Moments of knowledge transmission	Collaboration with project managers; Definition of the content of the reports; Information on project performance; Report validation process	Dialogues with the project manager	Dialogue with the project leader; performance headlight: green, orange, and red.
SERVICE	Monitor and control project performance	Competence development, including training	Communicate the status report to senior management; 1 page status report (OPR) for each of the 30 projects	Develop and implement standard methodology; Guide project managers	Communicate the status report to senior management
MOBILIZED COMPETENCES	Communication; Conflict management; Negotiation	Ability to learn quickly; Provide training	Communication; Collaboration; Power of synthesis	Empathy; Flexibility; Patience	Communication: Power of Influence

Source: Prepared by the author.

Campos et al. (2019) searched for a predefined list of general and specific skills to go to the field. Alternatively, this research went to the field and observed the PMO AAS professionals' skills emerge. To explore the work situation and the competencies the PMO AAS professionals mobilized, three elements of Zarifian (2001) were used to investigate individual competence mobilization: event, communication, and service.

Expanding the PMO through mobilized competence

While Table 4 compiles these services where professionals demonstrated competence and the skills (attributes) mobilized by them for each of the reported real examples, Table 5 relates these services to the 27 possible functions of a PMO pointed out in the findings of Hobbs and Aubry (2007).

Table 5.

Functions Of The PMO AAS (Relationship With Five Contexts)

PMO AAS	PMO functions by importance and grouping by affinities	Ranking by importance	Affinity group				
			1	2	3	4	5
F50AM, R41AF	Report project status to senior management	1	x				
D49AM	Develop and implement a standard methodology	2		x			
D26AF	Monitor and control project performance	3	x				
P39AF	Develop staff competency, including training	4		x			
D49AM	Guide project managers	12		x			
Legend - affinity group: 1) Monitoring and controlling project performance 2) Development of skills and methodology 3) Management of multiple projects 4) Strategic management 5) Organizational learning							

Source: Adapted from Hobbs and Aubry (2007).

To ‘communicate the status report of projects to senior management’, the PMO AAS F50AM mobilized communication skills, collaboration, and power of synthesis when he prepared a presentation of projects that would allow senior management, within an hour of meeting, to understand the performance of 30 projects of the organization, so that they could then decide even on the bonus of the company's employees. The PMO AAS R41AF, which operated in the energy distribution sector, mobilized skills such as assertive, non-violent communication and the power of influence to get the project manager to present the correct information regarding the project's performance. Both contributed to clarifying the actual status of the projects, corroborating Bernstein's (2000) view as one of the benefits of the PMO.

The professionals were competent to deliver the service of ‘communicating the status report to senior management’, which is considered, according to research by Hobbs and Aubry (2007), as the most important among the possible services and functions of a PMO and belongs, by affinity, to group 1, a group that encompasses project performance monitoring functions (Hobbs

& Aubry, 2007). This research contributes to the literature on PMO and PMO AAS when it shows that competences (skills) such as assertive communication, power of synthesis, power of influence, and collaboration are possible resources to be mobilized by professionals who provide the service of "communicating the status report to senior management."

In the situation that occurred in an economic development company, the service delivered by D49AM is associated with the possible functions of 'developing and implementing standard methodology' and 'guiding project managers.' According to the literature, these two services fall into the "development of skills and methodology" functions group and are the second and twelfth most critical services of a PMO (Hobbs & Aubry, 2007). The specialized literature still needs to address that empathy, flexibility, and patience may be necessary for implementing standard project management methodology.

Communication, negotiation, and conflict management can be resources to be mobilized when monitoring and controlling project performance. At least, that is how the professional PMO AAS D26AF, who worked for a contractor in the mining sector, managed an organizational restructuring situation that impacted the project schedule. The outsourced professional acted and mobilized skills such as communication, negotiation, and conflict management and was competent in monitoring and controlling project performance. This monitoring activity is one of the possible functions of the PMO, being the third most important given by the interviewees and belonging to the group of monitoring functions (Hobbs & Aubry, 2007).

Finally, in the context of the automotive sector event, the outsourced professional P39AF delivered the service of 'developing staff competence, including training'. Hobbs and Aubry (2007) pointed out that this was the fourth most crucial service of a PMO and a function that belongs to the group of competence development and methodology functions. This research points out that competences (skills) such as fast learning and providing training are essential for delivering this service.

The service delivered by D49AM can be related to two different functions of a PMO: developing and implementing standard methodology and providing guidance to project managers. Only two of the five groups of functions of a PMO are represented in this sample and are, respectively, the most important (Hobbs & Aubry, 2007). These functions defined by the data in this research are the project monitoring and performance control group and the skills and

methodology development group. The services delivered by the professionals are part of the list of 27 possible functions of the PMO, confirming similarities, therefore, of this research with the findings of Hobbs and Aubry (2007) and contributing when it presents, according to the perspective of the PMO AAS professionals themselves, necessary individual competences to perform some of these PMO functions.

Takey and Carvalho (2014), who studied competence in French current and project management, have already contributed to this approximation. However, no contribution is made using this French current regarding the project office professional, the PMO. Hence, the PMO professional was addressed in action through characterizing situations and events, communication, and service (Zarifian, 2001), theoretically contributing to the literature on PMO. Moreover, PMO constructs and outsourcing were gathered through the PMO AAS typology. Although others have already contributed concerning outsourcing and project management (cf. Takey & Carvalho, 2014), the outsourced PMO, or PMO AAS, continues to be a developing research agenda (Karkukly, 2019). In addition, works that address the outsourced PMO focus on the project office rather than the professional who works there (cf. Karkukly, 2019; Martins & Martins, 2012). This research contributes by researching the PMO professional and his performance in an outsourcing context.

Conclusion

This study used the notion of competence in the French current to investigate how the professional PMO AAS mobilizes competence in carrying out work with its contractor. Essential elements were brought to characterize the competence of professionals according to the constructivist perspective of French authors of competence, based on event, communication, and service, thus giving a prominent place to the role of context and action.

In showing the value of the PMO for the organization's processes and business, this research is helpful for PMO professionals and organizations that subcontract this service. For instance, PMO professionals and their clients can look for training courses that are better targeted at work situations and day-to-day events; workers can increase their professionalism and employability, and organizations can better evaluate whether to subcontract the PMO AAS for its implementation and operation. This was evidenced through an exploratory study and coding as an

analysis method to see the similarities between the different situations. However, future studies can conduct multiple case studies with narrative analysis to better characterize competence mobilization and explore a broader range of productive sectors as contexts in which the performance of an AAS PMO brings value to its client. Future studies can also investigate the competence mobilized by these professionals, according to the vision of their contractors, serving as a counterpoint to deepen an investigation into the phenomenon.

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