THE MANAGEMENT ROLE IN POSTGRADUATE STUDIES: COORDINATORS PERSPECTIVES

O PAPEL GERENCIAL NA PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO: PERSPECTIVAS DE COORDENADO

EL ROL DIRECTIVO EN LOS ESTUDIOS DE POSGRADO: PERSPECTIVAS DE LOS COORDENADORES

ABSTRACT

Objective: To investigate the meaning of the managerial role from the perspective of professor-managers in graduate programs at a Federal Institution of Higher Education.

Methodology: Qualitative approach, using the oral history method. Narrative interviews were conducted with fifteen graduate program coordinators.

Results: The narratives revealed that coordinators play a central role in managing internal and external relationships, facing challenges related to excessive bureaucracy, limited financial resources, as well as issues of status and egos which directly influence their management practices in the context of graduate programs.

Practical Implications: The results highlighted the need for institutional support for professor-managers through initiatives promoted by the educational institutions themselves and higher authorities.

Social Implications: The research suggested that supporting professor-managers could improve university management and, consequently, student training, thereby reflecting positively on society as a whole.

Theoretical Implications: This study contributes to the literature by addressing university management by highlighting the complexity and challenges faced by professor-managers. Additionally, it paves the way for future research on managerial practice in other academic contexts.

Originality/Value: This research offered a unique perspective by exploring the managerial role in graduate programs, a context that remains underexplored. It highlighted the importance of support initiatives for professor-managers, which are essential for enhancing the quality of university management and, therefore, the graduate programs.

Keywords: Professor-Manager. Coordinator. Postgraduate.

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ABSTRACT

Objetivo: Investigar o significado da atuação gerencial na perspectiva do professor-gestor da pós-graduação de uma Instituição Federal de Ensino Superior.

Metodologia: Abordagem qualitativa, utilizando o método da história oral. Foram realizadas entrevistas narrativas com quinze coordenadores da pós-graduação.

Resultados: As narrativas revelaram que os coordenadores desempenham um papel central no gerenciamento de relações internas e externas, enfrentando desafios relacionados ao excesso de burocracia, limitação de recursos financeiros, bem como às questões de status e egos que influenciam diretamente suas práticas de gestão no contexto da pós-graduação.

Implicações práticas: Os resultados apontaram a necessidade de apoio institucional aos professores-gestores, por meio de iniciativas promovidas pelas próprias instituições de ensino e por órgãos superiores.

Implicações sociais: A pesquisa sugeriu que o suporte aos professores-gestores pode melhorar a gestão universitária e, consequentemente, a formação de alunos, refletindo positivamente na sociedade como um todo.

Implicações teóricas: Este estudo contribuiu para a literatura ao abordar sobre gestão universitária destacando a complexidade e os desafios enfrentados pelos professores-gestores. Ainda, abriu espaço para futuras pesquisas sobre o exercício gerencial em outros contextos acadêmicos.

Originalidade/valor: Esta pesquisa apresentou um diferencial ao explorar a atuação gerencial na pós-graduação, um contexto ainda pouco estudado. Ela ressaltou a importância de iniciativas de apoio aos professores-gestores, que são fundamentais para aprimorar a qualidade da gestão universitária e, consequentemente, dos programas de pós-graduação.

Palavras-chaves: Professor-Gestor. Coordenador. Pós-Graduação.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: Investigar el significado de la actuación gerencial desde la perspectiva del profesor-gestor en programas de posgrado en una Institución Federal de Educación Superior.

Metodología: Enfoque cualitativo, utilizando el método de historia oral. Se realizaron entrevistas narrativas con quince coordinadores de posgrado.

Resultados: Las narrativas revelaron que los coordinadores desempeñan un papel central en la gestión de relaciones internas y externas, enfrentando desafíos relacionados con la burocracia excesiva, la limitación de recursos financieros, así como cuestiones de estatus y egos que influyen directamente en sus prácticas de gestión en el contexto de los posgrados.

Implicaciones prácticas: Los resultados señalaron la necesidad de apoyo institucional a los profesores-gestores, a través de iniciativas promovidas tanto por las propias instituciones de educación como por los órganos superiores.

Implicaciones sociales: La investigación sugirió que el apoyo a los profesores-gestores puede mejorar la gestión universitaria y, en consecuencia, la formación de los estudiantes, reflejándose positivamente en la sociedad en general.

Implicaciones teóricas: Este estudio contribuyó a la literatura al abordar la gestión universitaria al destacar la complejidad y los desafíos enfrentados por los profesores-gestores. Asimismo, abre espacio para futuras investigaciones sobre el ejercicio gerencial en otros contextos académicos.

Originalidad/valor: Esta investigación presentó un enfoque diferencial al explorar la actuación gerencial en la posgrado, un contexto aún poco estudiado. Resaltó la importancia de las iniciativas de apoyo a los profesores-gestores, que son fundamentales para mejorar la calidad de la gestión universitaria y, por lo tanto, de los programas de posgrado.

Palabras clave: Profesor-Gestor. Coordenador. Posgrado.

INTRODUCTION

In the environment of federal universities, managerial functions are often performed by faculty members themselves (Fleck & Pereira, 2011). These professionals can take on administrative roles at various hierarchical levels (rectorate, pro-rectorate, directorate, coordination, and department heads), provided they meet the specific requirements of each position (Ésther, 2007, p. 17).

In the case of course coordinators, the subjects of this research, their responsibilities include both administrative tasks and the pursuit of strengthening the programs they lead (Fleck & Pereira, 2011). According to the referenced authors, this work involves expanding the course's structure and resources, as well as promoting scientific development within the specific field of knowledge. Thus, the coordinator's role directly influences the achievement of results (Ferreira & Paiva, 2017).

In graduate education, this function becomes even more challenging. In addition to the common managerial responsibilities of course coordination, faculty members face specific demands from the Brazilian Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES), whose evaluation system imposes rigorous criteria and pressures professors to maximize their individual performance (Nascimento, 2010). The author points out that among these criteria, the requirements for a professor to be considered a "permanent faculty member" in a graduate program stand out.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that, in the context of graduate education, academic management involves not only administrative challenges but also subjective aspects that affect institutional relationships. Santos (2017) highlights that this environment is permeated by symbolic disputes and power dynamics, where competitiveness, egos, vanity, and individual ambitions influence organizational dynamics. In this setting, ego represents both the faculty members' pursuit of academic recognition and the perceived status some attribute to being part of graduate programs. As noted by Marra and Melo (2003), the most valued individuals in this context are those who publish the most and secure the most research funding, intensifying competition among peers.

This article is part of a broader study originally developed as a master's dissertation. Its objective is to investigate the meaning of managerial roles from the perspective of faculty members serving as academic managers in graduate programs at a Federal Higher Education Institution (IFES). Examining the meaning of work for faculty members at a public university is justified, among other reasons, by the fact that these institutions have been significantly impacted by changes in educational policy guidelines and funding (Kern et al., 2023). Additionally, the study is relevant due to the increasing complexity of academic management, particularly in public higher education, where faculty roles have become increasingly dynamic (Barbosa, 2015). The transition from professor to professor-manager presents challenges that highlight the dynamic nature of the role, reinforcing the need to understand the impacts of this role within the institutional context (Frade et al., 2024).

Moreover, this research sought to fill a gap in the literature, as most studies on the proposed topic (Barbosa, Paiva & Mendonça, 2017; Barbosa, 2015; Lima & Mâsih, 2010; Farinelli & Melo, 2009; Ésther, 2007) have not explored the graduate education environment. More recent studies, such as that of Pessoa et al. (2022), discuss academic management in higher education but focus on undergraduate course coordinators, analyzing the challenges of the role. However, they do not investigate the managerial specificities of graduate education, which have distinct dynamics, such as the strong influence of CAPES and the pressure for academic productivity.

The scarcity of research specifically addressing the managerial roles of graduate program coordinators was identified through a systematic literature review, in which databases such as SPELL, CAPES Journals, SciELO, and the Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (BDTD) were consulted. Keyword combinations related to academic management, managerial competencies, and course coordination were used. The results indicated that, although there are numerous studies on managerial competencies in higher education, most do not explore the

graduate education context, reinforcing the need for a deeper understanding of the role of coordinators in this setting.

As observed in the study by Fleck and Pereira (2011) and corroborated by the findings of the present study, the complexity and challenges faced by professor-managers in an environment as distinct and subject to CAPES' pressures as graduate education are notable. These authors further emphasized that understanding the common characteristics of faculty members managing graduate programs (PPGs) is essential for developing mechanisms to improve these programs in the country.

This article is structured as follows: in addition to this introduction, the theoretical framework section discusses faculty roles in higher education and the position of professor-manager in graduate programs. The methodology section details the procedures adopted, based on a qualitative approach and the oral history method, conducted with fifteen graduate program coordinators, utilizing narrative analysis to investigate the meaning of managerial roles from the perspective of these faculty members. The results and discussion section presents the central role of coordinators in managing internal and external relationships, as well as perceptions of status and ego in graduate education. Finally, the conclusion synthesizes the study's reflections, emphasizing the importance of support initiatives for professor-managers to enhance the quality of graduate program management.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Teaching in Higher Education

Teaching, in its formal sense, refers to the work of professors; however, in practice, this role encompasses a set of responsibilities that go beyond the act of teaching (Veiga, 2005). According to the author, over time and with changes in working conditions, the demands related to teacher training have expanded beyond subject-matter expertise.

Thus, the teaching profession involves not only mastery of content but also the development of essential knowledge for teaching practice. Tardif (2002) highlights that teachers' knowledge has a social nature and is developed through professional experience. According to the author, this knowledge is not limited to cognitive understanding but includes various dimensions, such as pedagogical, disciplinary, curricular, and experiential knowledge.

Moreover, teaching requires particular and distinct characteristics compared to traditional approaches still in practice. Pimenta and Almeida (2011) emphasize that university professors should engage in reflective, critical, and competent approaches in their teaching, giving meaning and significance to the curricular components they teach, which directly impacts students' professional training.

Masetto (2012) argues that the profile of a higher education professor involves not only expertise in a specific subject or field but also the ability to mediate the learning process. The author further develops this idea by emphasizing that effective teaching requires proficiency in a particular area of knowledge, pedagogical expertise, and an understanding of the political dimension of the profession. This political dimension, according to Masetto (2012), refers to the professor's role as an engaged citizen, aware of social transformations occurring both inside and outside academia and committed to their community.

Zabalza (2007) identifies three main dimensions that characterize the role of university professors: (1) professional dimension: requirements, identity, work parameters, professional dilemmas, etc.; (2) personal dimension: type of involvement and personal commitment, the professor's life cycle, personal circumstances that affect them; and (3) administrative dimension: contractual conditions, hiring and promotion processes, incentives, and general working conditions.

Each of these dimensions requires different approaches and the mobilization of various skills. For example, higher education professors must learn to handle administrative tasks (Marra & Melo, 2003), mediate conflicts (Barbosa, Mendonça & Cassundé, 2015), and balance multiple demands (Araújo, 2016) in light of their professional responsibilities. This reveals the complexity of their work and underscores its importance in the performance of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and in the training of professionals and citizens.

This scenario becomes even more complex when considering Padim's (2022) perspective, which highlights the increasing workload and demands imposed on university professors. In the context of graduate education, this challenge intensifies, as the study by Vivian, Trindade, and Vendruscolo (2020) indicates that excessive workload may contribute to distress in teaching.

In this context, Santos (2017) outlines the multiple roles of university professors: (1) professor, responsible for attracting students to research and scientific projects; (2) advisor, guiding research projects that support academic career aspirations; (3) manager, handling operational activities that may become part of a professor's career at some point; (4) evaluator, assessing students' work, peer research, or journal submissions; and (5) researcher, reinforcing the significance of graduate education by focusing on research, securing funding, organizing research groups, and advancing academic careers.

Thus, it is important to highlight that the traditional image of the higher education professor as the "sovereign" of knowledge—an expression used by authors to emphasize their central role in knowledge transmission—no longer meets the expectations of institutions and society as a whole (Barbosa, Mendonça & Cassundé, 2015). What is observed is that "the halo of enlightened scientists, specialists in their field, which is often associated with university professors" (Zabalza, 2007, p. 114) is no longer sufficient to address the new challenges these professionals face (Barbosa, Mendonça & Cassundé, 2015).

From this perspective, and based on the ideas of Gore & Begum (2012), it can be stated that management is a practical skill essential for the proper functioning of any organization, including educational institutions. Therefore, recognizing that management is intrinsically related to the activities of university professors, the next section explores the elements that define the managerial role, with a particular focus on the professor as a manager, to analyze its specificities.

The Role of the Professor-Manager in Graduate Education

The implementation of effective management in higher education institutions is essential, especially in an increasingly challenging and competitive environment (Bessant & Mavin, 2016). University management is considered part of the teaching profession in higher education, alongside teaching, research, and extension activities, as established in Article 3 of Decree 94.664/1987. This highlights an even closer relationship between academia and administrative functions (Brasil, 1987). Based on the premises proposed by Barbosa et al. (2017), the role of the professor as a manager—whether temporarily or permanently, as a rector, vice-rector, unit director, department head, or course coordinator—brings forth a specific role: that of the professor-manager.

When professors take on managerial roles, as highlighted by Basso & Silva (2021), their responsibilities expand, combining traditional teaching functions with administrative activities. Although management is an academic function, it is not an inherent part of the teaching profession, which primarily focuses on teaching, research, and extension activities (Silva & Cunha, 2012). Thus, managerial responsibilities present a challenge.

In management, professors develop relationships with various stakeholders, such as peers, students, academic councils, and society (Carroll & Wolverton, 2004; Barbosa, Mendonça & Cassundé, 2015). This context reveals that the professor-manager assumes complex and multifaceted roles (Carroll & Wolverton, 2004). However, according to Barbosa, Paiva, and Mendonça

(2017), it is difficult to distinguish these roles explicitly due to their close interconnection. Whitchurch (2007, p. 15) adds that "there is no easy separation between their intellectual and administrative aspects. Academic values and managerial practice have been blended in unexpected and volatile combinations."

Furthermore, it has been observed that the pressures and demands associated with managerial roles, which often lead to strain between the institution and the manager as well as between the manager and faculty members, can explain the reluctance or lack of interest among professors in assuming course coordination responsibilities in higher education (Santos, 2022).

In the context of graduate education, the role of the professor-manager has specific characteristics. As noted by Grohmann and Ramos (2012), graduate programs and their faculty members are continuously evaluated by CAPES, in accordance with the guidelines established in its regulatory documents and the four-year evaluation system. According to the authors, these evaluations, based on the completion of the Sucupira Platform, consider productivity criteria, including the number of advisees, time to graduation, number of research projects, teaching hours, completed defenses, and scientific output, in alignment with the scores assigned to journal publications. This aspect directly affects the managerial workload, requiring specific administrative competencies from graduate program coordinators.

As a result, the workload is significantly impacted by CAPES requirements, increasing the professor's responsibilities and potentially compromising the quality of their academic output, particularly regarding the time available for research and the autonomy to produce scientific work (Maués & Mota Junior, 2011). The authors argue that faculty members often experience work-related syndromes, such as stress, insomnia, and depression, due to the additional workload.

In addition, graduate program coordinators typically assume their managerial roles with little prior knowledge of administration, learning through hands-on experience (Fleck & Pereira, 2011). According to the authors, these professors tend to focus more on task management and compliance with regulations, often as a response to pressure for results and adherence to academic guidelines. Moreover, they face reduced free time and an increased number of advisees while engaging in activities aimed at legitimizing their position in academia, whether through recognition, personal satisfaction, or the pursuit of status associated with research activities (Santos, 2017).

The presented scenario underscores that the professor-manager—in this case, the graduate program coordinator—performs a professional role deeply influenced by the specific elements and unique characteristics of their institutional context. Thus, this study aims to investigate how these professor-managers at a federal higher education institution (IFES) perceive and assign meaning to their managerial role.

METHODOLOGY

To achieve the proposed objective, the classification by Burrell and Morgan (1979, p. 18) was adopted, grounded in the interpretive paradigm, which "seeks explanation within the realm of individual consciousness and subjectivity, within the participant's frame of reference, as opposed to that of the action observer."

Thus, considering that the professor in the role of a manager performs an "eminently social activity that should be viewed as a matter of context and historicity, which cannot be understood without being experienced" (Gomes et al., 2013, p. 237), qualitative research was chosen. Furthermore, the research was characterized as field research with an exploratory nature, allowing for a more accurate view of the topic (Gil, 2002).

The oral history method was chosen, which enabled an understanding of more fundamental aspects, as well as recurring elements from the interviewee's narrative, perceiving their expressions regarding hesitations, emphases, and other nuances (Alberti, 2013). More specifically, the choice was for thematic oral history, as the focus was on discussing experiences and situations that explain the central phenomenon of the study (Freitas, 2002).

The research context was a Federal University of Higher Education, and the subjects were 15 (fifteen) course coordinators working in stricto

sensu Graduate Programs (PPGs), excluding those from the fields of Administration and related areas. This selection was based on the premise that these professionals have some training or knowledge in management. The inquiry that motivated the research arose from the need to understand how individuals with backgrounds distant from management perceive the exercise of managerial duties.

The selection of subjects was done for convenience, i.e., based on their availability, which ensured the feasibility and flexibility of the data collection process. Additionally, the "snowball" research technique was used, where participants themselves recommend other potential interviewees, facilitating access to the research field and expanding the network of contacts relevant to the study (Godoi & Mattos, 2006).

The interview process was conducted until theoretical saturation was reached, following the principles established by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Flick (2009). Theoretical saturation was achieved when the narratives began to present recurring patterns, with repeated information across interviewees. Examples of these patterns include stories about the challenge of balancing multiple demands, the internal and external relationships established, pressures from CAPES, bureaucratic excess, and specific contextual issues such as status and ego-related aspects.

Most of the interviewees are female, married, and aged between 31 and 69 years. All hold a doctoral degree and have been working at the institution for 2 years and 6 months to 44 years. The total experience in coordination (including roles as vice-coordinator) ranged from 1 year to 15 years, with experience in graduate programs ranging from 11 months to 8 years. Only one of the interviewees has a course in the field of Administration.

The data collection instrument used was a narrative interview guide, allowing for a deeper investigation of what was being studied, with minimal influence from the interviewer (Muylaert et al., 2014). Fifteen interviews were conducted, totaling approximately 11 hours of recordings, averaging 44 minutes per person.

In addition to the recordings of the interviews for subsequent analysis, after each in-terview, the researcher recorded her initial impressions regarding the interviewee's speech, expressions, and emotions in response to specific parts of their narratives. General notes were also taken on how the interview process unfolded, serving as records for the field diary. These recollections were important for guiding and developing the analysis of the results.

The narrative analysis technique was chosen because it enables understanding how meanings are constructed through participants' narratives. As Easterby-Smith and Araújo (2001, p. 23) state, "meanings are constructed through dialogue, and views are communicated through the oral narrative of stories," which allowed the investigation of the meaning of the professor-manager's managerial role in graduate education at a federal higher education institution (IFES).

Therefore, the coding was done line by line, based on the narratives of the interviewees. Coding and categorization are viewed by Flick (2009) as methods that are particularly emphasized in research arising from interviews, focus groups, or observation, with the main activities being the search for "[…] relevant parts of the data and analyzing them by comparing them with other data, naming and classifying them" (p. 132).

The reflective analysis of the narratives was conducted from the recordings, which were organized into separate files for each interviewee. This approach considered the connections with the categories and their corresponding indicators, as well as elements that led to the emergence of new aspects and analysis codes.

Each research subject was identified as C (coordinator) followed by the Arabic numeral corresponding to the order in which the interview was conducted, ranging from C1 to C15. Finally, to demonstrate and highlight the correspondence of the narratives with the analyzed categories, the main excerpts, expressions, and/or words narrated by the interviewees were highlighted in bold.

Based on the methods employed, the following results highlight the main challenges and central characteristics of management in graduate education, which influence the perception of professor-managers regarding the meaning of their role in this context.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Although they have not ceased to be teachers, the interviewees experienced (and continue to experience) a period in their careers where their responsibilities increased as they took on managerial roles and became professor-managers. Thus, it is important to understand their experiences resulting from the new responsibilities they assumed (Silva; Cunha, 2012), in order to investigate the meaning they attribute to the managerial role in the context of graduate education.

The interviewees' conceptions were revealed, essentially, through categories related to internal and external relationships with other entities, especially CAPES, as well as issues of status and egos in graduate education, seen as factors influencing the role of the coordinator in this environment.

Internal and External Relationships

Lima and Mâsih (2010) highlight that the coordinator's activity goes beyond mediating relationships between professors and students, as they also need to be knowledgeable about the needs of their area, make decisions that contribute to the academic community, meet the demands of the Ministry of Education and CAPES, be responsible and committed to the quality of the program, manage teams and work processes, and act strategically, focusing on the development of students. These elements were reflected in the following statements:

> The graduate coordinator acts as a **bridge between students**, professors, and **higher administrative bodies**. For example, they are the ones who will work on filling in the data to inform **CAPES** about the course's functioning; the coordinator is the one who will organize, together with the professors, the courses that will be offered; they are the ones who will **follow up on each student's case** to check if everything is going well, if they are facing any difficulties that could delay their deadlines; the coordinator is the one who will

think administratively about how to **plan, create strategies**, and **improve the quality** of the course, obviously in collaboration with **higher authorities**, such as the Graduate Studies Pro-rectorate and the Center's administration (C1).

> [...] dealing with **professors, students**, and the **public in general** [...], in addition to the things that may seem obvious, there are other dealings with **other entities** that you also need, such as managing resources, managing people, and having **networks**, **relationships** both within the university and with **other institutions' networks** (C5).

Therefore, the excerpts from the speeches of C1 and C5 highlight the coordination's relationship with students, professors, and other higher administrative bodies, both within and outside the institution, as well as the need to "create strategies" to "improve the quality of the course," thus aligning with the concepts pointed out by Lima and Mâsih (2010). This underscores the broad role of the coordinator, who, in addition to being a communication link, also assumes a strategic function in course management.

When professors take on managerial roles, as emphasized by Basso & Silva (2021), their responsibilities expand. C7, for example, sees the coordination as a bridge dealing with different segments, divided by the interviewee into three groups:

> **(1) students**, who are our clientele, our main target, so we need to be aware of what the student comes to seek here [...] and what we can offer [...]; **(2) professors,** "[...] with all their tasks, classes, thesis committees, attending conferences, personal life, family, and everything. So, we have to reconcile and see the human being, first and foremost, [...], but at the same time, try to make this professor one who will contribute to the growth of the course, a professor who meets the obligations of teaching, advising, submitting reports, filling out Lattes [...]; **(3) infrastruc-

ture, which is really something that makes us very, very, very stressed. [...] Graduate programs have a much higher external demand, they need to train quality masters and doctors, they need research laboratories, space for advising, internet, which seems like a very basic thing, but we suffer a lot with that [...].

As highlighted by C7, coordination needs to deal with three major groups: (1) students, who are the main focus of the work, (2) professors, whose responsibilities go beyond the classroom, and (3) infrastructure, which proves to be a constant challenge in the management of graduate programs, requiring adequate resources for the development of academic activities and research. In managerial practice, the interaction between these elements requires strategic management that allows for balancing academic needs, operational challenges, and resource limitations.

The managerial exercise, which is essential to ensure the success of all these interactions, is therefore profoundly influenced by the coordinator's leadership ability (Santos, 2022). This leadership aspect is fundamental because coordinating is not limited to making administrative decisions but also involves articulating the contributions of a group of people with diverse skills and interests, as illustrated by the speeches of C6 and C11, which highlight that the coordinator's role involves "articulating the contributions of a group" (C6) and "directing, together with others, specific activities" (C11).

Coordinating is trying to **articulate the contributions of a group** in favor of a project, which **is not an easy task**. We have a curriculum, a formative proposal, we have to train masters in two years, train doctors in four years, which is even too much time, and we have an infrastructure with research lines, so how do we get everyone to work together in one convergent direction to achieve the institutional goals? **This is not easy** (C6).

Coordinating is about **directing, together with others**, specific activities [...], coordination comes from an ordering, so you

have to put things in order, with the **simultaneous mutual** help of several people involved, so that there is a final product, based on **goals set by the group**, because when you coordinate, you need to define goals, set objectives and the targets to achieve those objectives, but that has to come from a group that decides this, and the coordination will facilitate or will arrange this in the best possible way [...] **but it is not easy** (C11).

Both speeches (C6 and C11) used the expression "it is not easy," highlighting the difficulty of managing a teaching body in a convergent direction to achieve common objectives. This challenge is explained by the coordinator's responsibility in a web of relationships managing people, often with divergent interests and motivations (Marra & Melo, 2003). The ability to mobilize the teaching staff toward a collective goal is fundamental in managerial practice, as without clear and aligned direction, efforts may scatter, compromising the results and the cohesion of the group.

The coordinator's leadership role is emphasized by C2, who talks about the importance of being an example for the team. According to C2, "[...] **you have to have leadership**, and you also have to be an example; if you're demanding something, you also have to have fulfilled what you are demanding, because otherwise, it won't have any effect." This point is supported by Franco (2002), who argues that, at a minimum, the coordinator should be an example for both faculty and students, representing an active leadership within the course.

However, the exercise of coordination is not limited to people-oriented leadership, as it also involves administrative challenges, as evidenced by C12 and C9. According to C12's narrative, coordination goes beyond bureaucratic tasks: "I think the role of a manager, especially a coordinator of undergraduate or graduate programs, who deals with students, with young people, **goes far beyond simply handling the bureaucratic part**, signing papers, doing this or that."

Although the administrative function is also recognized, some view bureaucracy as an excessive burden on the coordinator's work. C9, in a tone of frustration, expresses their discontent with the bureaucratic system, describing coordination as "a hell on earth":

As a coordinator, we get overloaded in a **bureaucracy logic that is crazy** because every day new internal or external regulatory resolutions from [institution name] arrive, demanding tasks be completed yesterday, seeking information or procedures, which, in fact, we see are nothing more than a **waste of energy**, or rather, a waste of energy, because they won't result in much. Moreover, there is a bureaucratic logic in the form of the integrated system, and it pertains more to the **logic and needs of the higher instances** than to a bureaucratic rationality that makes things easier. So, to me, this is the absurd of absurdities, having a system that is increasingly **rigid and bureaucratic procedures that make things very difficult** [...], bureaucracy ends up becoming the final activity [...] that even homogenizes and disregards a series of specificities in the Humanities, Applied Social Sciences, Legal, Exact, Natural, and Health Sciences, treating everything as equal or focusing on what are considered the most promising and strongest in the eyes of the administration [...], suffocating the specificities and demanding things that make no sense, and this is a **terrible waste of human energy**, which is why it's a hell on earth (C9).

C9's blunt statement, expressed in a tone of frustration, showed a strong connection between the coordinator's work and bureaucracy, specifically its excess, attributed to the constant creation of resolutions and regulations, as well as the fulfillment of tasks and addressing the needs of higher instances, which, according to the interviewee, do not adopt a "bureaucratic rationality that makes things easier," placing an overload on the coordinator's work, resulting in the "waste of energy" emphasized in the passage.

C9's description of "bureaucracy as hell"

reflects the impact of limited rationality, highlighting how excessively complex organizational systems can undermine managerial efficiency, exacerbating the workload and complicating the decision-making process (Simon, 1997). Furthermore, the interviewee's remarks support the findings of Corrêa's (2017) study, which revealed that the "bureaucratic" work, including tasks like document routines, regulations, procedures, and fulfilling requirements from both the university and external agencies, demands the most time and energy in the role of a course coordinator.

In addition to bureaucracy, other challenges were pointed out by the coordinators. C3, for example, believes that the coordinator should also be concerned with organizing research groups. C3 justifies this statement by explaining that "[...] a graduate program is a more cohesive research group, so it's about bringing together the ideas of these researchers and facilitating the transfer of knowledge in training new professionals." This point is supported by Fleck and Pereira (2011), who observe that teacher-managers should focus on the growth of the program and the scientific development of the field.

This scientific development is linked to the recognition of higher instances, such as CAPES, as discussed by C14 and C13, who talk about communication with CAPES and the financial management of graduate programs.

[...] has a federal sphere, which is the **communication of the program with CAPES,** and especially this issue of updating data, sharing defenses, filling out the **Sucupira platform**, filling out other platforms [...]. And another part that I think really involves management and planning is the financial part; the university receives the PROAP [Postgraduate Support Program] annually, based on the number of students and the number of scholarships the program has, and we have to manage this resource, which is actually a very small resource, but we have to manage it somehow (C14).

The coordinator is responsible for guiding, within the secure areas of the program, administrative and academic decisions,

for example, in the meetings of the collegiate, making decisions on things that are not normally covered by the regulations and also for rectifying decisions made by the regulations. He is also responsible for filling out the evaluation on the Sucupira platform, which I think is the most important part because it determines the program's score, **which will determine how important the program is to CAPES** [...]; responsible for **managing the financial balance of the PROAP** and other sources of resources we receive (C13).

These statements demonstrated that the coordination assumes responsibilities that go beyond the relationship with students, professors, and internal bodies, as they focus, in the specific case of postgraduate programs, on the relationship with CAPES. The financial management perspective, in light of managing the balance of the Postgraduate Support Program (PROAP), was also seen in both statements, indicating the concern with managing resources for the proper functioning of the program.

Furthermore, filling out evaluation platforms, such as Sucupira, also emerges as a crucial responsibility for coordinators, as reported by C13. These platforms are decisive for the evaluation of the program's quality by CAPES, which has direct implications for the continuity and resources allocated to the program. Therefore, managing the Sucupira platform is not limited to an administrative task but involves a strategic activity that can impact the program's maintenance or closure.

In this context, the relationship with CAPES and its requirements were also highlighted in the statements of C10 and C4, as they emphasized a transformation in the role of coordination due to changes in evaluation systems over time, making these processes more demanding, as C10 stated in a concerned tone.

Being a coordinator in the current context is not the same as being a coordinator 10 or 15 years ago, as was the case for me when I started [in another program that I was part of] and even later when I was a coordinator here in 2012, 2013, more or less. The context was different. Today, I think the context is one of many challenges. The demand **has increased, as has the requirement for evaluation by CAPES**. [...] Today, the university itself places many barriers for us to establish agreements, **so we work without resources** [...] and with a **greater demand from CAPES** for a number of things (C10).

I think that **being a coordinator**, **at this moment**, is trying to make the college understand a little of what the program's profile is and for us to understand together what this profile is because, over the last 10 years, **postgraduate education has changed a lot, it has grown a lot, and the CAPES evaluation systems have changed a lot**, so it ends up being like I know the information from yesterday, and my colleagues have to know it tomorrow (C4).

The transformation in the role of the coordinator over the years, as pointed out by C10, reflects the changes in CAPES' requirements and the broader context of postgraduate education. New demands, such as the increased requirements in evaluations and the scarcity of financial resources, make management more complex and challenging. Furthermore, C4 shares that the constant changes in the CAPES evaluation criteria require continuous updating of information and constant adaptation on the part of coordinators.

The situation described in the testimonies can be contextualized by studies such as Nascimento (2010), which observes that the pressure imposed by CAPES' criteria directly affects the performance of faculty members. The constant demand for improvements in program quality and individual faculty actions, without the necessary financial support, can be a hindering factor in achieving the desired goals.

Thus, the increasingly rigorous demands from CAPES, combined with the lack of financial resources, not only make the management of postgraduate programs more challenging but also intensify the pressure on coordinators. This

scenario of constant adaptations and demands can generate negative impacts on performance and compromise the physical and emotional health of these professionals (Vivian, Trindade & Vendruscolo, 2020). Additionally, the growing demands in postgraduate education also reinforce power dynamics and recognition in the academic environment, as discussed in the following section.

Status and Egos in Postgraduate Education

The narratives allowed for an understanding of a peculiar aspect of postgraduate education, which is the status of the professor working in this context (Santos, 2017; Colares et al., 2019). This status may be related to other elements such as competitiveness, vanity, and egos, mentioned in Santos' (2017) study and also evidenced in the present study.

The aforementioned studies offer an opportunity to reflect on the competitive attitude and the valorization of the "academic work" — often tied to the volume of scientific production — as an indicator of status in academia. This conception is visible in the statements of the interviewees, as evidenced by C4, who describes the difficulty in dealing with egos present in the academic environment.

"The ability **to deal with egos is difficult**, in academia it is something that, in fact, I think no coordinator has" (C4), a point also identified by C3: "I confess to you that it is very tiring, [...] it causes a lot of headaches, because it is not easy to **deal with egos**, it is impressive how many egos there are in this academic environment." The interviewee expressed concern as she pointed out that egos lead to faculty isolation, stating: "I feel this lack, there is no partnership here" (C3).

The lack of partnership was highlighted when C3 mentioned disputes among professors regarding who approves more projects, revealing a sense of competitiveness. Egos manifest when a professor develops a behavior of "thinking they are better than everyone else" (C3). This competitive behavior is more evident in the attitudes of faculty members who see themselves as superior

to others, a characteristic that, according to Marra and Melo (2003), is related to the emphasis on the volume of academic production, where those who publish more and gain more prominence in research areas are often the most valued. Thus, disputes for academic prestige and recognition for research results are central aspects of the configuration of the status of professors in postgraduate education.

On the other hand, C4's reflection on the choice to work in postgraduate education brings to light a critique of the motivations of some faculty members. C4's narrative draws attention to the choice and the true meaning of working in postgraduate education, as a commitment to the training of students and the evolution of research.

> [...] it is about dealing, at certain moments, with very different interests, **with people who have very different views on what postgraduate education is**. It seems like there's this need to say, "Ah, in postgraduate education I will be able to teach whatever I want, develop whatever project I want" [...]. Professors, I think, for a long time had this sense of **status in teaching in postgraduate education** [...] now, in the last 10 years, with evaluations and self-evaluations, it has become clearer that **being in this place is very much a choice**, a choice for education, for continuing to educate, and for research [...] (C4).

T**he expression used by C4, "being in this place is very much a choice," reflects the idea expressed by Santos (2017), highlighting that the professor's commitment to postgraduate education is voluntary.** On the other hand, **C4's dissatisfaction** is evident **when** she expresses frustration **at having to** constantly explain what should be obvious to her colleagues: "[...] **explaining to people what I thought was obvious and, sometimes it's not, that we have to be part of a team, that it's not about carrying your project alone, and that we have to support the students in terms of their actual education**." This dissatisfaction may reflect the fact that many professors guide their careers based on their individual goals, "[...] whether to faci-

litate their removal, to consolidate research, and/or to ensure the advancement of their activities through opportunities that only those linked to a postgraduate program can access" (Santos, 2017, p. 183).

These elements reflect the duality of interests and goals among professors in postgraduate education, where, on the one hand, there is a pursuit of status, often motivated by vanity and competitiveness, while, on the other, there is a need for a more collective approach, committed to academic training and the collaboration required to achieve better results.

The reflection of C11, in turn, as shown below, brings to light an important critique of the social perceptions surrounding professors in postgraduate education. The metaphor of the "different professor" seems to carry a stigma, where those working at this level of education are seen as superior, which, for C11, does not align with reality. The interviewee questioned the idea that postgraduate professors consider themselves "different," demystifying this view by stating that, in reality, they are simply assuming more responsibilities.

> When we face postgraduate education, it's already a smaller or minimal subset of professors who are in it, and there's still this thing where those in postgraduate education are seen as professors who **think they're better**, that they want to be different. But in reality, no, we don't want to be different; **we don't receive anything extra for being in postgraduate education, financially speaking** […]. So **there's this thing that professors in postgraduate education are different**, but we're not different. What happens is that we are adding more responsibilities to our academic, scientific, and labor activities (C11).

For the interviewee, professors in postgraduate education accumulate "more responsibilities," even though they do not receive anything more for working in this context, "financially speaking" (C11). This perspective reinforces the studies by Colares et al. (2019), reflecting that the status obtained by the professor can explain their

connection to postgraduate education, as the professional practice suffers an accumulation of responsibilities but without an increase in financial resources in the professor's remuneration.

Therefore, the entire scenario presented demonstrates a peculiar environment that the professor-manager needs to understand in order to perform, and also reinforces the findings of Colares et al. (2019) by highlighting that, in the task motivation scale for professors, the item with the highest level of agreement among them concerns the status acquired through their involvement in graduate programs (PPGs), which may demonstrate a sense of prestige in the professor's relationship with their peers.

CONCLUSION

Professors-managers, when taking on course coordinations, faced the challenge of directing team work in order to achieve objectives essentially based on student training. The interviewees' testimonies showed that social relationships transcend those with students, professors, staff, and internal instances, as coordinators also interact with CAPES, to whom they must provide feedback regarding the quality of graduate programs (PPGs) to remain part of this system. Thus, the impressions regarding the meaning of postgraduate coordination, as reflected in the narratives, showed the coordinator in a central role in managing internal and external relationships.

The interviews also revealed that the role of the coordinator becomes more complex due to excessive bureaucracy and the limitation of financial resources, leading to exhaustion and mobilization of extra energies. In view of this, the interviewees highlighted the importance of collaboration to fulfill the collective project inherent in their PPG. Moreover, other aspects were pointed out as challenging in managerial performance, including status and egos that permeate the context.

Therefore, the overall landscape of the research demonstrated the challenging role played by the postgraduate coordinator and also highli-

ghted them as a bridge for relationships with students, professors, bodies, and higher instances, such as CAPES, with the aim of boosting the quality of the PPG in a space (that should be) democratic.

In light of the above, it is important to emphasize that the research made a significant contribution to the literature and to the field of management, specifically university management. This contribution came through the results achieved, which revealed the complexity of the role played by the professor-manager and the challenges faced in performing the role while balancing different functions. In addition to highlighting the overload and managerial difficulties, the study provided an in-depth analysis of the central role of coordinators in managing internal and external relationships and the dynamics of status and egos within graduate programs. Thus, it contributed by expanding the debate on academic management and highlighting the need for institutional support for these professors.

These results indicated the importance of educational institutions paying more attention to the role of professors-managers, seeking to offer support initiatives and adequate conditions for them to achieve the expected goals. Additionally, they suggested the need to rethink CAPES' criteria and evaluation methods, since some testimonies pointed to resource limitations that hinder improvements in PPGs, which deserves attention from higher instances. Furthermore, this research suggested that support for professors-managers can improve university management and, consequently, student training, reflecting positively on society.

This study, due to its methodological choices, allowed for a deeper understanding of the analyzed phenomenon. However, the research being conducted in only one institution limited the generalization of the results, as the meaning of managerial performance may be conditioned by the particularities of the institutional and regional context. The challenges faced by the professor-manager in postgraduate education may vary depending on the organizational structure, institutional policies, and academic culture of each institution, shaping their perception of the managerial role.

Additionally, the conduct of this research presented challenges, such as difficulty accessing some managers due to their overloaded schedules and the limited time for conducting interviews. In one case, an interview had to be conducted in a fragmented manner because the coordinator had to interrupt it several times to address urgent demands.

Given this, without intending to exhaust the topic, it is suggested that future research in the area could deepen the understanding of the professor-manager's role in different academic contexts.

Comparative studies between institutions could highlight how institutional conditions impact the exercise of management. Another possibility is to investigate institutional support strategies for professors-managers, analyzing initiatives from different higher education institutions aimed at faculty development for university management.

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