O PAPEL DO PROFISSIONAL DE SECRETARIO NA GESTÃO DE PROJETOS COMPLEXOS

THE ROLE OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSIONAL IN THE MANAGEMENT OF COMPLEX PROJECTS

Marcos Roberto Piscopo

Doutor em Administração pela Universidade de São Paulo – USP

Professor do Programa de Mestrado Profissional em Administração – Gestão de Projetos da Universidade Nove de Julho – PMPA-GP/UNINOVE

E-mail: mpiscopo@uninove.br (Brasil)

Franciane Freitas Silveira

Doutoranda em Administração pela Universidade de São Paulo – USP

Professora do Programa de Mestrado Profissional em Administração – Gestão de Projetos da Universidade Nove de Julho – PMPA-GP/UNINOVE

E-mail: franciane@uninove.br (Brasil)

Data de recebimento do artigo: 12/07/2013

Data de aceite do artigo: 11/09/2013

O PAPEL DO PROFISSIONAL DE SECRETARIO NA GESTÃO DE PROJETOS COMPLEXOS

RESUMO

Como uma profissão do tempo dos escribas, o secretariado se desenvolveu significativamente ao longo do tempo, contudo a pesquisa nesse campo parece não ter acompanhado o papel dos praticantes. Atualmente a especialização requerida do profissional de secretariado envolve não somente as habilidades que anteriormente caracterizavam seu trabalho mas também um conjunto de novas habilidades mais relacionadas com a administração da organização. Essas podem incluir mas não se limitam à viabilização de resultados que de forma geral inclui o envolvimento em gestão da mudança, criatividade e empreendedorismo, planos de aumento da produtividade, ações de corte de custos e gerenciamento de projetos. Devido à complexidade que caracteriza o ambiente de negócios e os projetos das empresas, este artigo busca investigar o papel do profissional de secretariado na gestão de projetos complexos. Como uma pesquisa exploratória, três casos foram estudados em empresas globais nas quais projetos complexos fazem parte de sua realidade e o profissional de secretariado existe oficialmente. Os resultados demonstram que o envolvimento desse profissional foi muito positivo para o desempenho do projeto devido à forma como ele forneceu suporte ao gerente do projeto e à equipe do projeto. Tanto as habilidades hard quanto as soft foram muito importantes para o desempenho do projeto, especialmente a comunicação, a negociação e a atitude. O secretariado executivo evoluiu de uma perspectiva operacional para uma estratégica. Para continuar crescendo na profissão o secretário precisa aprimorar seu conhecimento sobre gerenciamento de projetos.

Palavras-chave: Profissional de Secretariado; Projetos Complexos; Gestão de Projetos.

THE ROLE OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSIONAL IN THE MANAGEMENT OF COMPLEX PROJECTS

ABSTRACT

As a profession that dates back the scribes' time, the secretariat has significantly evolved over time but research on this field seems not to follow the practitioners' role. Nowadays, the specialization required from the administrative professional involves not only the previously skills that for long time characterized the secretary's job but also a set of new ones that are more related to the organization's management. They may include but are not limited to enabling results in a wide sense as getting involved in change management, creativity and entrepreneurship, productivity increasing plans, cost cutting actions, and project management. Due to the complexity that characterizes the business environment and companies' projects, this article aims at investigating the role of the administrative professional in the management of complex projects. As an exploratory research, three case studies have been conducted with global companies in which complex projects are part of their reality and the administrative professional is officially existent. Findings show that the involvement of this professional has been very positive to project performance due to the way he supported the project manager and the project team. Both secretary's hard and soft skills were of great importance to project performance, especially communication, negotiation, and attitude. The executive secretariat has moved from an operational to a strategic perspective. To continue growing in the profession the secretary needs to improve his knowledge on project management.

Keywords: Administrative Professional; Complex Projects; Project Management.

1 INTRODUCTION

The administrative professional, so called secretary, has been a profession with increasing recognition and high specialization. By supporting executives' activities this professional plays an essential role to the organization, what goes far beyond the conventional wisdom. The responsibilities of the secretary vary across organizations and depend on their size and structure. In such a way, his duties previously included tasks as communication, filling, agenda, just to name a few. Although, nowadays, the administrative professional plays a new role that is more connected with the company's results such as advising the administrative process design (Maçaneiro, Catezu, & Korchaque, 2012), connecting decision makers with executors (Medeiros & Hernandez, 2009), engaging cost cutting actions D'Elia (2009), and contributing to quality and productivity programs (Santos & Caimi, 2009).

The scientific literature on the administrative profession is still under development and as a result the body of knowledge on this research field is small, what calls for more studies in order to better understand where it is heading. By exploring the literature one realizes that scientific studies may be grouped according to their focus into three main categories: technical-oriented skills, behavioral-oriented skills, and management-oriented skills.

Extant literature on technical-oriented skills involves works conducted to investigate the information technology (Adelino & Silva, 2012; Vitalis, Geötzke, & Andriolo, 2011), the foreign languages (Santos & Kundman, 2012; Santos, 2012), the professional formation in secretariat (Durante, Vaz, Bertoletti, Santos, & Chais, 2011; Martins, Terra, Maccari, & Vicente, 2010).

The behavioral-oriented skills group encompasses articles aimed at analyzing the quality of life at work (Ortega & Araujo, 2011; Sartori, 2011), the professional attitude (Fontanella, 2011), the behavioral flexibility (Terra & Machado, 2011), the gender (Barros, Izequiel, & Silva, 2011), the ethics and confidentiality (Whitaker & Cavalcanti, 2010), the conflict mediation (Moreira & Olivo, 2012).

The management-oriented skills group comprises studies carried out to understand the administrative professional and the entrepreneurial thinking (Barbosa & Durante, 2013), the decision making process (Faria & Pacheco, 2013), the corporate governance (Fonseca, Parra, Azevedo, & Lopes, 2010), the integrated management system (Mascarenhas, Sepulveda, & D'Assumpção, 2011), the talent retention (Lima, Santana, & Santos, 2011), the time management (Lima & Jesus, 2011).

Due to the characteristics of the business environment and its high pace of change the

complexity theory has been seen as an approach that allows some flexibility to deal with the main issues that impact project performance. The literature on this subject started gaining notoriety with Baccarini (1996)'s work and continued increasing with scholars that explored its application to a variety of situations and areas such as project ecologies (Newell, Goussevskaia, Swan, Bresnen, & Obembe, 2008), agile methodologies (Mishra & Mishra, 2011), problem solving (Ahern, Leavy, & Byrne, 2013), transportation projects (Owens, Ahn, Shane, Strong, & Gransberg, 2012), and knowledge sharing (Santos, Soares, & Carvalho, 2012), just to mention a few.

The current business landscape, in which complexity is a relevant characteristic, requires not only that executives build new management capabilities but also their assistants to play a more structured role in the management of projects. We argue that there is a knowledge gap regarding the participation of the administrative professional in the management of complex projects. Then, this work aims at answering the following research question. *How to connect the administrative professional's role with the management of complex projects?* We justify this study based on Biscoli (2012)'s argument that relevant research may contribute to a profession's evolution and on that of Oliveira (2011)'s that theory on the secretariat field is still under construction.

This article is structured into five sections. After contextualizing the research theme, the second section covers the role of the administrative professional and the management of complex projects. The third section explains the methodological procedures employed. Section four is dedicated to show and analyze the data from the field research. Then, the last section presents the conclusions, research limitations and avenues for future investigations.

2 THEORY REVIEW

This topic has been built to cover two main themes: the administrative professional and the management of complex projects. It did not mean to be exhaustive but to bring aboard the main aspects of the themes under investigation.

2.1 THE ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSIONAL

The literature on the administrative assistant profession shows it is an old and important occupation since the scribes' time. Throughout the history this profession has evolved and gained notoriety not only in the business world but also in the academia with the emergence of several

undergraduate and technical programs. Although, as mentioned by Neiva and D'Elia (2009), one may note changes that include but are not limited to the administrative professional's role, the new competences required, and the higher level of responsibility.

According to Mata (2009), the role of the administrative professional has moved from an operational to a strategic perspective in which his responsibilities go far beyond organizing the executive's agenda and supporting his personal tasks to actively enable results, changes and quality and facilitate organizational processes. Therefore, the secretary plans, organizes, executes, directs and controls his activities, which have become more diversified and extensive (Mazulo & Silva, 2010). As an example, the secretary may be the bridge between those who make decisions and those who execute them (Medeiros & Hernandez, 2009).

Additionally, as argued by D'Elia (2009), the administrative professional may build entrepreneurial competences that he and the whole organization will benefit from new solutions regarding process design, task simplification, cost cutting, and creativity. Then, it is expected that the secretary will contribute to increase quality and productivity (Santos & Caimi, 2009). This is the reason why besides their technical knowledge, the secretary must know the executive's functional area and industry the company competes (Medeiros & Hernandez, 2009).

Due to the business environment dynamics the formation of administrative professional has been a significant challenge to be considered by organizations and scholars. As found by Martins et al (2010), difficulties and biases have motivated the secretary to pursue educational improvement in order to be better qualified for the work market. Additionally, Durante et al (2011) emphasized the importance of the secretary's role to the professional identity and the relevance of capacity building for employability and professional growth.

Following Soler (2013) the participation of the administrative professional in the management of projects is of great importance. Organizations create projects with several intentions such as developing new products, implementing change programs, building new facilities, going international, creating marketing campaigns, among others. In line with Shenhar and Dvir (2007:4), "projects are also the drivers that make organizations better, stronger, and more efficient". For this reason projects must be well managed in order to achieve their objectives. To make it happen, the right people must be involved in the right tasks. Project managers do not need to control everything in a project and maybe they do not want to (Curlee & Gordon, 2011). The secretary has the required hard and soft skills to support not only the project manager but also the project team. In doing so, the administrative professional could contribute to project performance while improving his knowledge on project management.

2.2 COMPLEX PROJECTS

Complexity theory emanated from the chaos theory and considers that things are not so organized as previously thought (Curlee & Gordon, 2011). According to the same authors, it was initially applied to mathematics and sciences and, lately, to social sciences and business.

Curlee and Gordon (2011) argued that complexity theory is about the necessary flexibility to deal with every single human interaction and situation, what is not feasible through the total order. They also emphasized that less order does not mean less control and the complexity theory can be a successful approach to manage complicated and complex projects. Complimentarily, Newell et al (2008) defended that project ecologies tend to receive limited attention since traditional research on project management and organization usually considers an individual project as locus of innovation but complex product development generally depends on multiple projects that are distributed across organizations, space, and time.

Bosch-Rekveltda, Jongkindb, Mooia, Bakker, and Verbraeckb (2011) differentiated project complexity from project management complexity by stating that latter is part of the former. Therefore, project complexity is something that is not limited to managerial complexity. According to Baccarini (1996: 202), project complexity can be defined as “consisting of many varied interrelated parts and can be operationalized in terms of differentiation and interdependency”. As per Remington and Pollack (2007:3), “a complex project is a complex adaptive system”. Shenhar and Dvir (2007) pointed out that project complexity is impacted by product complexity and suggested three levels of project complexity as follows.

- Assembly: this level of project complexity refers to those undertakings conducted in a given functional unit by a small team that communicates intensively and is based in a specific location.
- System: at this level of complexity projects involve entire platforms and are more complex than the assembly ones requiring the involvement of a variety of organizations and the central project office coordination.
- Array: this level of complexity is found in a dispersed group of systems that work together in order to reach a major objective and are known as programs under an umbrella organization.

As organizations learn how to apply complexity theory's principles they will be much more important to the project management field and as a result it is expected to mature as complexity theory does (Curlee & Gordon, 2011). Ahern, Leavy & Byrne (2013) studied complex project management as complex problem solving by exploring knowledge transfer between complex projects. Mishra and Mishra (2011) investigated how to adopt agile methodologies in complex software project development as a means to overcome risks and other barriers. Owens et al (2012) based upon techniques and sources of complexity proposed a model to understand complex transportation projects.

Bosch-Rekveltda et al (2011:738) proposed a framework in which project complexity can be understood in terms of “technical (goals, scope, tasks, experience, and risk), organizational (size, resources, project team, trust, and risk), and environmental aspects (stakeholders, location, market conditions and risk)”. For them, these elements contribute to project complexity and, therefore, should integrate the framework.

According to Remington and Pollack (2007) there are four types of project complexity that have been defined considering the sources of complexity, each of which demonstrating particular characteristics and imposing specific management challenges as follows.

- Structurally: usually existent in large projects and definitely in very large ones, this kind of complexity comes from difficulties associated with managing a lot of tasks and activities that are different and interconnected.
- Technically: often found in projects that deal with something new, such as a product or a technology, in which technical or design problems arise due to the multiplicity of interdependent solution choices.
- Directionally: this kind of complexity generally emanates from the ambiguity related to different understanding of goals and objectives since they are not clearly shared with those involved in the project.
- Temporally: this type of complexity commonly originates from uncertainty concerning what will happen in the future, such as changes and constraints, what is not under the project team control.

3 METHODOLOGY

Considering that the present article aimed at connecting the administrative assistant's role with the management of complex projects and knowledge on this is still under development, we have chosen the exploratory method since, according to Martins and Theóphilo (2007), it is suitable for situations when one seeks for understanding facts and phenomena in a real context. Additionally, we have opted for the case study strategy because, as per Yin (2001), it is an empirical investigation compatible with the proposed research question.

To address the previously stated research question we defined the complex project as the unit of analysis. Following Remington and Pollack (2007: 3) "a complex project is a complex adaptive system", exhibiting characteristics such as hierarchy, communication, control, emergence, phase transition, non-linearity, adaptiveness and sensitive dependence.

Due to the importance of case selection for theory building (Eisenhardt, 1989), we have selected three cases according to the convenience criterion although assuring their representativeness for the phenomenon under investigation. We have done that based on Gerring (2007)'s argument that these are typical cases in which a wider phenomenon takes place. Therefore, to match the requirements of complex projects we have chosen three undertakings executed by three different large organizations that operate globally within the financial services, consulting services, and information technology industries. To keep their identities, from now on, we will refer to them as A, B, and C.

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews with seasoned project management professionals. The choice for this type of interview was due to its flexibility and potential to gather information throughout the conversation. As complexity is not something well defined and easy to understand the semi-structured interview seemed to be the most appropriate type that would make the conversation flow in such an organized way.

To carry interviews out we developed an interview protocol and an interview schedule. The protocol aimed at clarifying for interviewees the interview steps and what to do in each phase. We initiated interviews by describing the research objective, ensuring confidentiality, and explaining the meaning of complex project. The interview schedule listed questions addressed to interviewees, which were grouped into four sections as follows: (i) organization and interviewee profile, (ii) project profile, (iii) project complexity, and (iv) the administrative professional in the management of complex projects. Then, we asked the interviewee to select a complex project and to respond questions based on it.

To analyze data we have adopted the Remington and Pollack (2007)'s types of project complexity and the Shenhar and Dvir (2007)'s levels of project complexity. Hence, for the types of project complexity we have used the structurally, technically, directionally and temporally categories. For the levels of project complexity we have utilized the assembly, system, and array dimensions. To carry out the analyses we have employed the content analysis technique since, according to Richardson (1999), it is based on messages and, as per Mozzato and Grzybovski (2011), enables a critical and reflexive approach.

4 DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

We started the analysis by presenting the organization and interviewee profile. Then, we covered the project profile and project complexity. Finally, we discussed the involvement of the administrative professional in the management of complex projects.

4.1 ORGANIZATION AND INTERVIEWEE PROFILE

Project A has been conducted by a large private organization that competes in the global financial services industry serving both corporate and consumer clients. The interviewee holds a managerial position in the marketing area and has strong knowledge on the company's business and on the field of project management.

Project B has been executed by a large private consulting company who globally serves corporate clients. They may be private or public organizations that need to improve their operations. The respondent is a seasoned professional who manages undertakings in the operations area and has solid knowledge on project management.

Project C has been carried out by a large company in the information technology industry. This organization serves corporate and private firms to improve their information technology structure and services all over the world. The interviewee is a project manager who has strong knowledge on the field of operations, especially on the project management office.

As one may note the three companies in which the selected projects have been conducted are large organizations that compete worldwide serving big clients in their industries. The respondents are professionals with deep knowledge on project management and solid experience in their functional areas.

4.2 PROJECT PROFILE

Project A was a large undertaking in terms of budget that involved around 40 people during nearly 18 months. This project aimed at developing a new financial information product through which corporate clients could raise information about business groups to support the decision making process. This product required a new technological platform that has been developed by a specialized external organization. From the client's perspective the project has been successful since it increased its operational efficiency through the reduction of manual processes and made easier for the organization to comply with internal rules and market regulation.

Project B took around 1 year and engaged nearly 100 people in a large budget undertaking. This was a consulting project created to help a client reduce its operational costs and implement a sustainable improvement system. The project team encompassed professionals from both the consulting organization and the client's manufacturing facilities. By working together both teams have built a desired solution and the client organization's level of satisfaction has been very high since the sustainable improvement system has achieved its main purpose, cost reduction to be precise.

Project C involved nearly 250 people during 5 years and it was considered large in terms of budget. This undertaking has been created with the objective of outsourcing information technology services. The main external partner that supported the project execution was a cabling provider. Although all teams have done their best, the client's level of satisfaction with project performance has been medium since the project's product basically allowed the client to increase its profits.

The three projects analyzed have been large undertakings conducted by global companies to support large corporate clients improve their operations. They were considered complex projects due to the ambiguity and adaptive system characteristics. The involvement of interrelated parts also reinforced the complexity view since these projects could not be carried out only by the executing organization.

4.3 PROJECT COMPLEXITY

Project A's product, a financial information platform, can be seen as a system since it is a flexible platform in which users define their own rules to analyze business groups. The platform is composed of around 20 million enterprises, whose data can be combined and grouped up to users' choice to assess any individual or organization. This is in line with Shenhar and Dvir (2007:

103)’s system category since Project A is “a complex collection of units, subsystems, and assemblies performing multiple functions”. The complexity level of this project is that of the system since as stated by its project manager “the project management office has supported the integration of several teams to achieve the desired objective”. Project A is technically complex because it faced technical and design difficulties associated with the development of something that had not been done before. According to the project manager, “the project created a new product that required the involvement of the information technology and infrastructure areas” that worked together to develop and adapt new technologies and means of payment.

Project B’s product is a “management system aimed at improving company’s global operations” as said by the project manager. As the global operations system involves several units who perform multiple functions this is aligned with Shenhar and Dvir (2007)’s view of system. The complexity level of this project is that of the array because “it is a collection of subprojects, geographically dispersed, that only working together would allow the organization to reach the global objective”, as the project manager said. Project B is directionally complex because of the ambiguity related to the necessary changes. As per its project manager, “a cultural change must take place to implement a new management system that enables greater efficiency”. This is aligned with Remington and Pollack (2007)’s point of view that ambiguity comes from differences in interpreting goals and objectives.

Project C’s product, as the project manager mentioned, “is an information technology outsourcing” in which the executing company migrated client’s systems to its platform to manage them as a whole. This is consistent with what Shenhar and Dvir (2007) call an array or system of systems because the executing organization is responsible for managing a network of systems working together for a common purpose. The complexity level of project C is that of the array as the undertaking consists of systems that must work together in order to integrate and monitor client’s information technology systems. Project C is technically complex since following its project manager “it dealt with client’s systems migration”. This kind of activity is very specific and may create conditions for the emergence of technical problems for the reason that it is not possible to accumulate experience and knowledge.

4.4 THE ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSIONAL IN THE MANAGEMENT OF COMPLEX PROJECTS

To better understand the role of administrative professional in the management of complex projects we analyzed each project separately as follows.

4.4.1 PROJECT A

In Project A the involvement of the administrative professional has mostly occurred in the initiation and closing processes. According to the project manager, “this is because in these phases there is a great need for communication and document exchange between heads of functional areas”. Complimentarily, the secretary has predominantly worked on the human resources, communications and integration project management knowledge areas. The main reason for that is also the information flow between the project team, functional areas, and external partners.

Although the administrative professional has participated in the management of this complex project his involvement was low. As per the project manager, “due to his knowledge on the organizational structure, the secretary could have been more active in the communication process”. Then, the administrative professional could explore possibilities to join more strategic activities since he has good interpersonal skills and access to different functional areas.

The secretary’s hard and soft skills were of great importance to project management. While hard skills, such as languages, helped him writing project reports to the global PMO, soft skills, like negotiation, should be better employed to resolve issues throughout the project life cycle.

To optimize the engagement of the administrative professional in complex projects, “his role and attributions must be defined at the kick-off”, as pointed out by the project manager. Once the secretary knows when and how to get involved, it is expected to get the most out of it. Moreover, he should have strong knowledge on project management to play a more strategic role in company’s undertakings.

4.4.2 PROJECT B

The involvement of the administrative professional in project B mainly happened in the execution, monitoring and controlling, and closing processes. This is for the reason that, according to the project manager, “the diagnostic has been conducted by specialist consultants”.

Regarding the project management knowledge areas, the secretary largely got involved in time, cost, human resources, quality, and stakeholders. For the kind of project analyzed the secretary played an important role connecting people and disclosing information on project progress.

The administrative professional has been effective in supporting the project manager and helpful in working with the project team to facilitating the implementation of the designed solution. As mentioned by the project manager, “several aspects have been considered, such as technical (productivity and cost performance indexes), infrastructure management (organization, internal processes, roles and responsibilities), and behavioral (communication, team work, etc)”.

Both hard and soft skills were administrative assistant strengths and contributed to project performance. On the hard side, the secretary did presentations, prepared training sessions, and conducted communication meetings. On the soft side, behavioral skills were meaningful to align and integrate teams located in different manufacturing facilities.

The engagement of the administrative professional has been very positive however it could be improved. For example, “the secretary could substitute for junior consultants in conflict situations”, as cited by the project manager. To be supportive in this way, the administrative professional must have solid knowledge on project management and play a strategic role at the leadership level.

4.4.3 PROJECT C

In project C the involvement of the secretary has principally happened during the initiation, planning, execution, and monitoring and controlling processes. As one may realize his participation has been strong and, as stated by the project manager, “the secretary took over the project”. This is consistent with his involvement in the ten project management knowledge areas, scope, time, cost, risk, human resources, quality, communications, procurement, integration, and stakeholders, to be precise.

In supporting the project team the administrative professional has received good evaluation scores and very positive comments. This is reinforced by the fact that he became the project leader and worked even more closely with all teams that integrated the undertaking.

The hard and soft skills of the administrative professional have contributed in a meaningful way to project performance. Among hard skills, we highlight technical (information technology) and language ones, which were of great importance because an international project required communication with foreign teams. Among the hard skills, negotiation, conflict resolution, attitude

and perception were relevant to manage the undertaking and establish governance.

The administrative professional had a remarkable participation in the selected undertaking. He performed a strategic role and received recommendations to engage other projects. Although, it has been suggested that he should improve his knowledge on project management to better deal with project issues.

4.5 SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

By analyzing projects A, B, and C we have concluded that the administrative professional has positively engaged these undertakings. The secretary's hard and soft skills were of great importance to project performance, especially the soft ones, such as negotiation, communication, and attitude.

The three executing companies compete in different industries, each with their own business rules and procedures. Understanding of company's operations associated with knowledge on project management have been found to be important for the secretary to grow in the profession.

As the complexity approach offers some flexibility in dealing with issues that emerge from several sources one may consider the administrative professional to get involved in some phases throughout the project life cycle. His participation may be seen as someone who has potential to connect the dots and cover some shadow areas that usually create conditions for the occurrence of problems.

The analysis reinforced the literature on executive secretariat by demonstrating that this profession has been evolved and started to play a more strategic role. Therefore, besides the specialization in the traditional tasks the secretary must improve his management-oriented skills. In addition, this should also be explored by scholars not only from the field of secretariat but also from business administration.

5 FINAL REMARKS

We idealized this article with the intention of bringing together two themes of our interest and that from the best of our knowledge have not been connected yet. The executive secretariat has been selected due to its increasing importance and recognition as a profession. The management of

complex projects has been receiving growing attention in the business world and there is a large potential for exploring this field.

Findings show that the administrative professional played a relevant role in the selected projects moving from an operational to a strategic perspective. Both secretary's hard and soft skills were of great importance to support the project leader and the project team in performing their own activities. To continue growing in the profession, the executive secretary needs to improve his knowledge on project management in order to better engage projects, especially the complex ones.

This work contributes to both the academia and the practice. In the academic line, contributions are associated with knowledge building on the secretariat field, especially regarding the potential connections between the administrative professional and the management of complex projects. To practitioners this article is a contribution in a way that it shows how the administrative professional may be engaged in complex projects and how this engagement may influence their performance. Therefore, this work may represent a window of opportunity not only for secretaries but also for project managers.

Even though we have employed our best efforts there are some limitations to be acknowledged. First, we have investigated only three distinct projects in financial services, consulting services and information technology industries and, as a result, we cannot assure that projects in other industries will follow the same logic. Second, we have only analyzed the involvement of the administrative professional in the management of complex projects from a managerial perspective (project manager and senior consultant), not covering that of the secretary. Third, we have adopted the Remington and Pollack (2007)'s types of project complexity and the Shenhar and Dvir (2007)'s levels of project complexity, however these might not have the appropriate fit for the selected projects.

We see some opportunities for future studies connecting the administrative professional with the management of complex projects. The present article, as an initial work, was exploratory in its nature and next ones would be more descriptive. It would also be of great value to conduct a statistical work with projects from a variety of industries to better understand the relationship between the role of the administrative professional and the management of complex projects in a larger sample. Another suggestion would be investigating the target relationship also from the perspective of the secretary in order to compare with that of the project manager.

REFERENCES

- Adelino, F. J. S., & Silva, M. A. V. (2012). A tecnologia da informação como agente de mudança no perfil do profissional de secretariado. *Revista de Gestão e Secretariado*, 3(2), 5-23.
- Ahern, T., Leavy, B., & Byrne, P. J. (2013). Complex project management as complex problem solving: A distributed knowledge management perspective. *International Journal of Project Management*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2013.06.007>
- Baccarini, D. (1996). The concept of project complexity – a review. *International Journal of Project Management*, 14(4), 201-204.
- Barbosa, S. M. C., & Durante, D. G. (2013). Secretariado executivo e empreendedorismo: realidade ou utopia? *Revista de Gestão e Secretariado*, 4(1), 56-74.
- Barros, C. M. P., Izequiel, D. S. A., & Silva, J. S. (2011). Os desafios enfrentados pelo profissional de secretariado executivo gênero masculino nas organizações contemporâneas. *Revista de Gestão e Secretariado*, 2(1), 158-176.
- Bíscoli, F. R. V. (2012). A evolução do secretariado executivo: caminhos prováveis a partir dos avanços da pesquisa científica e dos embates teóricos e conceituais na área. In D. G. Durante (Org.). *Pesquisa em secretariado: cenários, perspectivas e desafios* (35-74). Passo Fundo: Ed. Universidade de Passo Fundo.
- Bosch-Rekveltda, M., Jongkindb, Y., Mooia, H., Bakker, H., Verbraeckb, A. (2011). Grasping project complexity in large engineering projects: the TOE (Technical, Organizational and Environmental) framework. *International Journal of Project Management*, 29(6), 728-739.
- Curlee, W., & Gordon, R. L. (2011). *Complexity theory and project management*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.
- D'Elia, M. E. S. (2009). Empreendedorismo, intraempreendedorismo e empreendedorismo corporativo. In K. C. A. Portela, & A. J. Schumacher (Orgs.). *Gestão secretarial: o desafio da visão holística* (pp. 103-110). Cuiabá: Adeptus.
- Durante, D. G., Vaz, C. F. M., Bertoletti, R., Santos, M. E. M., & Chais, C. (2011). Atuação e ascensão profissional a partir da formação em secretariado executivo: levantamento com egressos da UPF/RS. *Revista de Gestão e Secretariado*, 2(2), 170-193.
- Eisenhardt, K. (1989). Building theories from case study research. *Academy of Management Review*, 14(4): 532-550.

- Faria, D. A. A., & Pacheco, F. L. (2013). O secretário executivo e a tomada de decisão em uma instituição de ensino superior do Estado de Sergipe. *Revista de Gestão e Secretariado*, 4(1), 104-125.
- Fonseca, E. C., Parra, P. S., Azevedo, M. S., & Lopes, P. C. (2010). A secretária executiva no processo de governança corporativa na empresa familiar. *Revista de Gestão e Secretariado*, 1(1), 1-24.
- Fontanella, R. (2011). Os tipos comportamentais dos executivos e a postura do profissional de secretariado. *Revista de Gestão e Secretariado*, 2(2), 79-104.
- Gerring, J. (2007). *Case study research: principles and practices*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Lima, M. C. F., & Jesus, S. B. (2011). Administração do tempo: um estudo sobre a gestão eficaz do tempo como ferramenta para o aumento da produtividade e work life balance. *Revista de Gestão e Secretariado*, 2(2), 121-144.
- Lima, M. C. F., Santana, M., & Santos, T. R. (2011). Retenção de talentos na profissão de secretariado. *Revista de Gestão e Secretariado*, 2(1), 101-130.
- Maçaneiro, M. B., Catczu, T. S., & Korchaque, E. de L. (2012). Assessoria executiva na padronização e organização de processos administrativos. *Revista de Gestão e Secretariado*, 3(1), 109-133.
- Martins, C. B., Terra, P. M., Maccari, E. A., & Vicente, I. (2010). A formação do profissional em secretariado executivo no mercado de trabalho globalizado. *Revista de Gestão e Secretariado*, 1(1), 69-89.
- Martins, G. D., & Theóphilo, C. R. (2007). *Metodologia da investigação científica para ciências sociais aplicadas* (2a ed.). São Paulo: Atlas.
- Mascarenhas, M. H. de S., Sepulveda, F. A. M., & D'Assumpção, E. S. (2011). Sistema de gestão integrado: a atuação do secretário executivo. *Revista de Gestão e Secretariado*, 2(1), 177-192.
- Mata, M. A. (2009). O papel do secretário executivo na estrutura organizacional e na condução das relações humanas. In K. C. A. Portela, & A. J. Schumacher (Orgs.). *Gestão secretarial: o desafio da visão holística* (pp. 221-245). Cuiabá: Adeptus.
- Mazulo, R., & Silva, S. C. L. (2010). *Secretária: rotina gerencial, habilidades comportamentais e plano de carreira*. São Paulo: Editora Senac São Paulo.
- Medeiros, J. B., & Hernandez, S. (2009). *Manual da secretária: técnicas de trabalho*. (11a ed.). São Paulo: Atlas.

- Mishra, D., & Mishra, A. (2011). Complex software project development: agile methods adoption. *Journal of Software Maintenance and Evolution: Research and Practice*, 23(8), 549–564.
- Moreira, K. D., & Olivo, L. C. C. (2012). O profissional de secretariado executivo como mediador de conflitos. *Revista de Gestão e Secretariado*, 3(1), 30–53.
- Mozzato, A. R., & Grzybovski, D. (2011). Análise de conteúdo como técnica de análise de dados qualitativos no campo da administração: potencial e desafios. *RAC*, 15(4), 731-747.
- Neiva, E. G., & D’Elia, M. E. S. (2009). *As novas competências do profissional de secretariado*. (2a ed.). São Paulo: IOB.
- Newell, S., Goussevskaia, A., Swan, J., Bresnen, M., & Obembe, A. (2008). Interdependencies in complex project ecologies: the case of biomedical innovation. *Long Range Planning*, 41(1), 33-54.
- Oliveira, S. A. (2011). *Brevíssimo tratado conceitual da assessoria: para entender o secretariado*. Guarapuava: Gráfica Ideal.
- Ortega, C. C., & Araujo, L. F. (2011). Secretária executiva: estresse e emoção no trabalho. *Revista de Gestão e Secretariado*, 2(1), 131–157.
- Owens, J., Ahn, J., Shane, J. S., Strong, K. C., & Gransberg, D. D. (2012). Defining complex project management of large U.S. transportation projects: A Comparative Case Study Analysis. *Public Works Management Policy*, 17(2), 170-188.
- Remington, K., & Pollack, J. (2007). *Tools for complex projects*. Farnham, Surrey, UK: Gower Publishing.
- Richardson, R. J. (1999). *Pesquisa social: métodos e técnicas*. São Paulo: Atlas.
- Santos, C. V., & Caimi, F. E. (2009). Secretário executivo: formação, atribuições e desafios profissionais. In D. G. Durante, & A. A. Fávero (Orgs.). *Gestão secretarial: formação e atuação profissional* (pp. 23-41). Passo Fundo: Ed. Universidade de Passo Fundo.
- Santos, E. B. M., & Kundman, M. S. (2012). O profissional de secretariado e as línguas estrangeiras: uma experiência de ensino de língua francesa no sindicato das(os) secretárias(os) do Estado de São Paulo. *Revista de Gestão e Secretariado*, 3(2), 47–66.
- Santos, M. P. (2012). Importância do domínio de línguas estrangeiras pelos profissionais de secretariado executivo para atuação no mercado de trabalho em tempos de globalização: uma abordagem critico-reflexiva. *Revista de Gestão e Secretariado*, 3(1), 94–108.

- Santos, V. R., Soares, A. L., & Carvalho, J. A. (2012). Knowledge sharing barriers in complex research and development projects: an exploratory study on the perceptions of project managers. *Knowledge and Process Management*, 19(1), 27–38.
- Sartori, T. (2011). Comportamento organizacional: um estudo de satisfação de secretários executivos no Estado do RS. *Revista de Gestão e Secretariado*, 2(1), 32–55.
- Shenhar, A. J., & Dvir, D. (2007). *Reinventing project management: the diamond approach to successful growth and innovation*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Soler, A. M. (2013). Fundamentos do gerenciamento de projetos. In M. E. S. D’Elia, M. Amorim, & M. Sita (Orgs.). *Excelência no secretariado: a importância da profissão nos processos decisórios* (pp. 335-342). São Paulo: Editora Ser Mais.
- Terra, E. F., & Machado, F. H. (2011). O secretário executivo e a flexibilidade comportamental no trabalho. *Revista de Gestão e Secretariado*, 2(2), 105–120.
- Vitalis, L. W., Geötzke, L. D., & Andriolo, L. J. (2011). Da simples arquivística à modernidade digital. *Revista de Gestão e Secretariado*, 2(1), 56–76.
- Whitaker, M. do C., & Cavalcanti, T. N. (2010). Ética e sigilo na empresa e os profissionais de secretariado. *Revista de Gestão e Secretariado*, 1(1), 25–45.
- Yin, R. K. (2001). *Estudo de caso: planejamento e métodos*. (2a ed.). Porto Alegre: Bookman.