Vulnerable careers: analysis of media layoffs as a turning point for journalists

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Abstract

Technologies of the digital era have deeply impacted the world of work and several sectors such as the news industry. Despite significant changes in newsrooms worldwide, there is a research gap in labor and journalism. Besides, few studies concerning job cuts and layoffs approach the issue broadly, identifying how redundancies affect workers and force them to think about the future of their profession and career. This article aims to understand how laid off survivors and victims see the future of their profession and career in this complex scenario. For this qualitative and exploratory research, interviews were conducted with 18 journalists, in three focus groups, and an expert in the field. Findings demonstrate that experiencing an organizational downsizing represented a turning point (DELUCA and ROCHA-DE-OLIVEIRA, 2016) by evidencing that journalist's career has become vulnerable in a context where job insecurity, hopelessness, precariousness and damaged personal ties mirror dilemmas and suffering. Some of the interviewees left journalism and most of the others either plan to leave or are not sure whether they will remain in the profession, taking responsibility for finding a way out. This article brings together micro and macro perspectives (ABBOTT, 1993), an approach rarely found in Brazilian studies in Administration, and intersects topics generally discussed separately: career, redundancy and labor relations. Moreover, it contributes to career studies by using the turning point perspective to analyze layoffs, which are generally centered on the experience and its negative impacts (VACLAVIK, PITHAN, AVILA et al., 2017). Finally, it expands the scope of analysis to an occupation outside the Administration field, whose academic production is predominantly endogenous.

Keywords: Journalism. Career. Media layoffs. Labor relations. Focus Group.

Carreiras vulneráveis: uma análise das demissões da mídia como um ponto de inflexão para jornalistas

Resumo

O jornalismo, como outras indústrias, foi profundamente impactado pelas transformações da era digital e do mundo do trabalho. Observa-se, porém, uma lacuna na produção acadêmica envolvendo trabalho e jornalismo. Ademais, há poucos estudos sobre demissão que abordam o fenômeno a partir de uma perspectiva ampliada, identificando como a demissão afeta a perspectiva do sujeito e força o trabalhador a refletir sobre as projeções futuras da profissão e da carreira. Assim, o objetivo deste artigo é compreender como jornalistas que vivenciaram demissões coletivas enxergam o futuro da profissão e da carreira. Neste estudo, qualitativo e exploratório, foram entrevistados 18 jornalistas, em 3 grupos focais (GF), e 1 especialista no tema. Como resultados, a demissão, ao evidenciar a vulnerabilização da carreira jornalística – em que a precarização, a desesperança em obter melhoras e o desmantelamento dos laços pessoais refletem dilemas e sofrimentos causados pela perda do sentido do trabalho – representou um ponto de inflexão na carreira dos entrevistados (DELUCA e ROCHA-DE-OLIVEIRA, 2016). Uma parte dos entrevistados deixou o jornalismo e a maioria dos demais planeja sair ou não tem certeza se permanecerá na profissão e responsabiliza-se pela busca de saídas. Como contribuições, este estudo aproxima e aborda simultaneamente as perspectivas micro e macro (ABBOTT, 1993), enfoque raramente encontrado nos estudos nacionais em Administração, e intersecciona temas em geral discutidos isoladamente: carreira, demissão e relações de trabalho. Além disso, contribui com os estudos de carreira, ao adotar a perspectiva do ponto de inflexão na análise da demissão, em geral centrada na vivência e nos impactos negativos nos estudos sobre o tema (VACLAVIK, PITHAN, AVILA et al., 2017a). Por fim, expande o interesse de análise para uma ocupação externa à Administração, cuja produção tem absoluto predomínio endógeno.

Palavras-chave: Jornalismo. Carreira. Demissão coletiva. Relações de trabalho. Grupo focal.

Carreras vulnerables: análisis de despidos como un punto de inflexión para periodistas

Resumen

El periodismo ha sido profundamente impactado por las transformaciones de la era digital y del mundo del trabajo. Sin embargo, se observa que hay una brecha en la producción académica sobre trabajo y periodismo. Además, pocos estudios sobre el despido abordan el tema en términos generales, identificando cómo los trabajadores son afectados cuando se los obliga a reflexionar sobre las proyecciones futuras de profesión y carrera. Este estudio intenta comprender cómo los periodistas que vivieron un despido masivo ven el futuro de su profesión y su carrera. Cualitativa y exploratoria, esta investigación entrevistó a 18 periodistas en tres grupos focales y una especialista en el tema. Los hallazgos demuestran que el despido fue un punto de inflexión (DELUCA, ROCHA-DE-OLIVEIRA, 2016), porque la carrera de periodista se vuelve vulnerable, y la realidad de inseguridad laboral, desesperanza, precariedad y lazos personales dañados refleja dilemas y sufrimientos. Una parte de los entrevistados dejó el periodismo y la mayoría de los demás planea salir o no está segura si permanecerá en la profesión y se responsabiliza por encontrar salidas. Como contribuciones, este estudio acerca y aborda simultáneamente las perspectivas micro y macro (ABBOTT, 1993), lo que poco hacen los estudios nacionales en Administración, y cruza temas en general discutidos aisladamente: carrera, despido y relaciones de trabajo. Además, contribuye a los estudios de carrera con la perspectiva del punto de inflexión en el análisis del despido, en general centrada en la vivencia y sus impactos negativos en los estudios sobre el tema (VACLAVIK, PITHAN, AVILA et al., 2017). Por último, expande el interés del análisis a una ocupación externa a la Administración, cuya producción tiene absoluto predominio endógeno.

Palabras clave: Periodismo. Carrera. Despido masivo. Relaciones de trabajo. Grupo focal.

INTRODUCTION

Changes in the world of work mirror economic, social, political and technological transformations. The traditional employment model, which was a rule for decades, no longer represents the way to make a living for many workers (MANYIKA, LUND, BUGHIN et al., 2016). The safe and full-time job, based on a long-term and steady employment relationship, coexist with other forms, marked by the rise of a model based on service rendering, where workers manage their work, skills, and career (OLTRAMARI, 2010). Flexibility, as a characteristic of this process, appears in the loosening of employment relationships such as temporary hiring, pay-per-task jobs, and outsourcing. The technological transformations have led to an expressive reduction in the number of jobs (RIFKIN, 1995, 2015) in a scenario of intense competition and global economic uncertainty (ILO, 2017). In addition, job opportunities have become increasingly scarce, and waves of redundancies are increasingly frequent.

In general, Brazilian researches on job cuts and layoffs have involved new forms of work organization and management resulting from economic policy changes, particularly from the 1990s on (VACLAVIK, PITHAN, AVILA et al., 2017a). Given the new market demands, organizations are forced to modernize and increase quality, making them increasingly embrace technology and cut jobs. Privatizations, mergers, and incorporations took place, having a strong impact on some sectors such as banks.

Most Brazilian researches on organizational downsizing address the theme from the employees' perspective and emphasize the experience, impacts and negative effects of redundancy, in which feelings of inadequacy, dissatisfaction and anguish arise, as well as frustration, fear, mistrust, stress, and helplessness (VACLAVIK, PITHAN, AVILA et al., 2017a). Few articles address the phenomenon from a broad perspective by seeking to identify how it affects people in terms of profession and career. While imposing changes in the ways of being and working, layoff can be understood as a turning point (DELUCA and ROCHA-DE-OLIVEIRA, 2016), which forces the worker to guess the future of his or her career and life in a context in which professional trajectories are less and less organizational and linear and are increasingly individual, multiple, and kaleidoscopic.

In this regard, Lee, Huang and Ashford (2018) mention the gap in research regarding entire careers that become uncertain, which is the case of journalism in their view, as a result of organizational downsizing caused by the imposition of external demands (economic circumstances, shifting consumption preferences, and automation). Unlike job insecurity, career insecurity is dramatically more intense in terms of 1) the high social stigma, since it is not about losing an individual job; instead, the whole sector is no longer viable; 2) matters of identity, like "identity loss, reactions associated with such loss, and the identity work that people might perform to move forward" (LEE, HUANG and ASHFORD, 2018).

Moreover, barely no attention has been given in the Brazilian academic production concerning labor relations in the journalism industry, deeply impacted in the digital era. Contrary to other sectors, whose transformations were well recorded on the media, work and organization changes in journalism have had no room, even in daily Brazilian news: "journalists are not news," says the common sense in the field. Changes have become drastic since the 1990s, when innovations in communication technologies created new possibilities for production and consumption of information (FONSECA and SOUZA, 2006), whose impact on the sector was compared to the invention of the press in the 15th century (FONSECA and KUHN, 2009).

The introduction of digital technologies in journalism led to the "optimization of time and work" (FONSECA and KUHN, 2009, p. 58). Production was re-structured based on work intensification, with task overload (SOUSA, 2008), extinction of roles and dismissal of workers that did not adapt to the demand to become multitask workers (LOPES, 2011) – similarly to what happened to bank employees (WEBER and GRISCI, 2011; NASCIMENTO, DAMASCENO and NEVES, 2016). The number of formal job positions decreased, and new possibilities of unstable, precarious and unregulated jobs grew in the journalism job market (FIGARO, 2013). The absorption of journalists by Internet companies grew at first but did not compensate for the massive cuts of positions in the traditional media (MCCHESNEY, 2012).

Brazilian scholars (PEREIRA and ADGHIRNI, 2011; LOPES, 2011), even when admitting deep changes in the journalistic practice, particularly due to the industry's difficulty in keeping profitable and to the advent of the Internet, recommend caution in adopting the journalism "crisis" speech used by North American colleagues (MCCHESNEY, 2016; REINARDY, 2011). Classifying it as "crisis" would imply the belief that the previous model was stable, as if the activity and the industry were immune to periodic structural innovations.

Journalism layoffs are well documented in countries that have detailed statistical data. In Canada, 12,000 positions were cut in two decades (PPF, 2017); in Portugal, 1,100 journalists lost their jobs from 2000 to 2012 (BASTOS, 2014); in Australia, 2,000

positions were extinct from 2011 to the beginning of 2017 (ALCORN, 2017). In the USA, job cuts have increased following the 2008 economic crisis (MEYER, 2009), and the number of journalists hired fell from 52,600, in 2008, to 32,900, in 2015, according to the annual census by the American Society of News Editors (ASNE). The organization stopped estimating the number of journalists working in newsrooms for it became impractical to follow the speed of newsrooms restructuring, which, in addition to eliminating jobs, creates informal employment relations that companies were not willing to disclose (ASNE, 2016).

Brazilian researchers focus on the impact of transformations on communication processes (production, distribution, and consumption of news). Approaches on the perspective of workers deeply affected in their work practices, required skills, perspectives for the future and career, relations, and the meaning of work are rare. One of the exceptions is Heloani's research (2005) on the deterioration of life quality of journalists due to the changes in the world of work. However, even while addressing the worker's viewpoint, the author does not use the perspective of massive redundancies, intensified and systemic, occurred in the journalistic circles (as his study was conducted from 2002 through 2003, a period when this process had not been revealed yet with such intensity in Brazil). International studies, on the other hand, demonstrate that journalists who experienced layoffs feel insecurity and fear of taking risks (EKDALE, TULLY, HARMSEN et al., 2015; REINARDY, 2011), reduction of professional identity (SHERWOOD and O'DONNELL, 2016) and reluctancy to get a new job in the field (NEL, 2010). It reinforces how important it is to analyze layoffs to broaden the understanding of this transformation process. Respondents say they were satisfied in the past, and even those who have been "kicked out" of journalism are proud of their profession.

Therefore, the question of this research is: given the deep transformations that affected the journalism field in the last decades, how do journalists see the future of their profession and career after experiencing a layoff? In an attempt to clarify some of the research gaps mentioned, this study aims to understand how journalists who experienced collective redundancy see the future of their profession and career. The initial hypothesis is that being laid off is a rupture that means a career turning point from a contextual perspective. In the following chapters, we present the theoretical framework, which addresses the changes in the journalistic environment and the concepts of the profession, career and layoff in this research; the methodological path; presentation, analysis, and discussion of results based on field findings; and, finally, the considerations that conclude this study.

WORK TRANSFORMATIONS IN JOURNALISM

Journalism was created in Europe between the 16th and 17th centuries (SOUSA, 2008). Its primary purpose was not making a profit; instead, it aimed at spreading political or religious ideas of newspapers' owners. With the Industrial Revolution and reduction in production costs, its large-scale production was made possible, which led to its commercial phase. Targeted at a wide audience, press agencies would sell newspapers at nominal prices and were funded by advertising. In 1910, Max Weber pointed out that a newspaper was an organization that depended on two clients (readers and advertisers) and that both had distinct or conflicting interests. The consequences of it went beyond the purely commercial ones (WEBER, 2002). The balance between those two customers was always decisive in the industry's formation and development.

In the 19th century, when the commercial phase of the press began, journalism was established as a profession. The workspace started to be shared and called "newsroom." The worker representation changed from solitary to collective: collectivity is what provides shape and identity to the professional group (FIDALGO, 2008). In the 20th century, journalism in western countries was institutionalized under a professional model, creating schools, codes of ethics, licensing standards, unions, and associations. Following the invention of the radio and TV, the job market grows, as well as press platforms and dependency on advertisers (BARNHURST and NERONE, 2009).

Since the 2000s, the press' funding has been shaken: computerization and the Internet have changed the behavior of consumers who, drawn by free and abundant information, forces advertisers to migrate to the digital environment (COSTA, 2014). This phenomenon caused the beginning of a structural crisis that leads the for-profit system to collapse (MCCHESNEY, 2016), but not only that. In addition to the financial issue, companies started to cut jobs because the technologies allow producing with fewer workers.

Following the prosumer[1] and co-creation movement (CÓRDOVA, 2016), the Internet brings down another pillar of the journalism: the distinction between producers (issuers) and consumers (receivers) of information. The audience itself starts to produce and reach massive audiences, taking away the monopoly from organizations. In addition to shaking the industry's financial support basis and leading to cuts of positions, (CAMPONEZ, 2009), it reduces the role of journalists and allows the audience to question their credibility, driving journalists to a crisis of legitimacy.

Life quality at work has deteriorated, as journalists are being forced to frantically adapt to new technologies, and their loyalty, friendship and trust are undermined by short-sighted behavior (HELOANI, 2005). As a response to the easiness with which companies remove their employees, journalists isolate themselves from the group. Even when they are "in love with what they do," some give up for no longer bearing the idea of "postponing happiness," as states Heloani (2005, p. 166).

Therefore, it reveals the complex context of layoffs in the field, which goes beyond financial crises. Given the changes in the industry and the work practice itself and also the shaken legitimacy of the activity as a social function, journalists subjected to dismissal process are in the middle of a conjuncture with multiple implications that affect their perceptions on profession and career.

PROFESSION, CAREER, AND LAYOFF AS A TURNING POINT

This study is based on Abbott (1993) and considers it crucial to reconcile micro and macro factors in studies on work and occupations, which are obtained from empirical research with multilevel data, i.e. micro level (information on careers), meso level (network structure among careers and jobs), and macro level ("occupation/organization-related information on occupations and work structures which are in conflict and in process").

This study followed the concept of profession found in Hughes' seminal article (1937), which describes it as a status obtained by an occupation that holds license and mandate (explicit or implicit) for its practice, which is legitimated by the socialization of its members, who share views of the world, experience, create associations and codes of values and/or legal regulations. The professionalization that gives occupation the status of profession results from claims of different groups competing to legitimately control a particular type of work (ABBOTT, 1988).

According to Hughes (1937, p. 410), career can be seen both objectively (sequence of clearly defined status and positions) and subjectively ("moving perspective in which the person sees his life as a whole and interprets the meaning of his various attributes, actions, and the things which happen to him"). Based on the subjective aspect, therefore, we understand that direction, destination and course of a career are movable and malleable because individuals are guided according to the social order and are positioned before institutions and collectivity, retrospectively and prospectively.

This study considers the understanding of Mayrhofer, Meyer, and Steyrer (2007, p. 215-217) for whom "careers are always careers in context" so that their analysis cannot be restricted to "the narrow view of individuals moving up corporate or professional hierarchies," disregarding the exogenous phenomena that shape them. Thus, the model proposed by the authors presents contexts that influence an individual career, which includes, for example, aspects like new forms of work and organization, socialization, and virtualization.

Moreover, DeLuca and Rocha-de-Oliveira (2016, p. 13) reinforce the importance of understanding career as a non-linear sequence, under constant transformation, where past, present, and future remain linked: "although the past has already been lived, it is continually reinterpreted. The future looks diffuse in the present moment and in re-signified memories, which allows one to reconsider abandoned alternatives." In addition, they say, when interpreted from a temporal perspective, dilemmas and conflicts make turning points and decisions more visible, bringing new possibilities for the understanding of careers.

The discussion on careers should not disregard turning points, which play a central role because they "can be understood as reflection milestones, usually resulting from experienced conflicts, dilemmas, and inquiries" (DELUCA and ROCHA-DE-OLIVEIRA, 2016, p. 12). So, layoff can be seen as a turning point in careers. Such point, herein contextually analyzed, represents

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[1] English neologism created by Alvin Toffler (1928-2016), who put together the words *producer* and *consumer* to indicate the dissolution of frontiers that previously separated these two subjects (FONTENELLE, 2015).

the rupture with the former position, hardly recoverable, because the loss of a job in a journalistic field is not an individual, isolated or reversible fact. In addition, implications that form the context are progressive, that is, reduction of work positions and loss of financial basis of press keep taking place.

In this context, the rupture imposed by layoff may lead journalists to unstable, precarious and unregulated work possibilities, where an army reserve oscillates between dismissals and temporary insertions in newsrooms (FIGARO, 2013). Those who get another job are susceptible to new ruptures given the plummeting of positions causing a collapse in the industry (MCCHESNEY, 2016). The journalist, now evicted from their work, faces the impact of transformations on their profession and career.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

The initial motivation for this research emerged from hypotheses raised by the authors, particularly because one of them has a degree in Journalism. As pointed out by Flick (2009), the starting point of a research can arise from empirical knowledge, from which investigative hypotheses are formulated. Thus, before the full design of the research, an interview was made with an experienced journalist[2] in order to understand her view on the phenomenon under study: transformations in journalism and their impact on labor relations. The journalist interviewed: a) has worked in the field for over 20 years; b) held management positions in newsrooms; c) experienced the transition to the online journalism and the downfall of newsrooms, with layoff processes; and d) went through five processes of organizational downsizing.

Based on that, given the qualitative (FLICK, 2009) and exploratory (GIL, 2010) nature of this study, the main technique chosen for data collection was the creation of focus groups (FG), because, according to Silva-Júnior, Silva and Mesquita (2014), purposes and meanings can be explored in more depth than individual interviews. For these authors, the use of FGs is the most recommended technique to address common concerns and contextual details, survey "opinions, feelings, perceptions, behaviors of specific theme" (SILVA-JÚNIOR, SILVA and MESQUITA, 2014, p. 130). Flick (2009) recommends the use of FG to study taboo subjects, which is the case of redundancy (SCHERER, VACLAVIK, CHAGAS-JÚNIOR et al., 2017), as a way to expand the discussion based on the collective skill to prompt answers and memories of events, more than what occurs in individual interviews. Likewise, aligned with Gaskell (2003), it is understood that, due to the social interaction they cause, FGs provide collective reflections while approximating subjects who collectively experienced organizational downsizing.

Eighteen people were interviewed in three FGs, from April 2017 to April 2018, in Porto Alegre, State of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. The division of groups is underpinned by Morgan (1996), who recommends smaller groups when topics are emotionally charged and generate a high level of involvement. Therefore, a maximum of eight people was invited to each session.

The research followed operational precepts as indicated by Silva-Júnior, Silva and Mesquita (2014):

1.   **Script:** seven initial open questions[3] guided the process. During the meetings, other questions were made to deepen or clarify some topic.

2.   **Selection of participants:** the homogeneity principle was followed, with criteria established *a priori,* namely, having a degree in journalism and having experienced a layoff in journalism. Since there is dissent in the literature about the ideal number of participants (SILVA-JÚNIOR, SILVA and MESQUITA, 2014), it was fundamental to allow all participants to express themselves without digression or parallel talks, which are common problems in larger groups. Out of the 24 people contacted through the researchers' networking, 18 attended the sessions. Broken down into three groups (details in Table 1); six people participated in the first session (one hour and 54 minutes); five participated in the second session (two hours and 15 minutes); and seven participated in the third session (two hours and eight minutes).

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[2] The expert interview is a methodological resource indicated by Flick (2009, p. 158), when "the interviewees are of less interest as a (whole) person than their capacities as experts for a certain field of activity."

[3] The questions initially asked to the interviewees were: 1) What was the impact of layoff on your life? How did you experience the organizational downsizing? 2) How have you perceived, from the moment you became a journalist, the transformations in the profession over time? 3) How do you assess the impact of technology on your profession (positive or negative)? 4) How did you use to do your work before the digital era, and how do you do it today? 5) For you, how does technology affect employment and work in general? 6) How do you view the future of your profession and how do you see yourself in the future? 7) How does a journalist defend the value of their profession?

3. **Conduction:** since one of the moderators is also a journalist, integration was easier (not only for access and communication, but also for the empathy with situations experienced and narrated by the interviewees). Besides, the fact that the participants knew each other from previous professional experiences contributed to creating a comfortable environment for everyone to express. Moderators sought to interact with the group, exploring all questions in the script, while letting the members follow "their own movement" (SILVA-JÚNIOR, SILVA and MESQUITA, 2014, p. 148).

4. **Data analysis and interpretation:** based on the experiences narrated by the expert (who recalled the big changes in journalism experienced throughout her professional journey and the career temporality) and the pre-analysis of the material obtained from the FGs (transcription of recordings and full reading), the analysis path was defined: layoff was seen as a turning point in a time perspective involving past, present and future. Such decision is supported by DeLuca and Rocha-de-Oliveira (2016), who advocate the use of this methodological resource in studies on career. The authors understand that "such an approach in career studies allows the researcher to see the changes over time and enables the vision of transformation in an expanded sense" (DELUCA and ROCHA-DE-OLIVEIRA, 2016, p. 13). Thus, considering redundancies as a turning point for analysis of the journalism career, the speeches were sorted and articulated in three main categories identified by the temporality of the narratives: the *before*, referring to the past before the layoff; the *after*, referring to happenings experienced soon after the waves of redundancies extending to the present time; and, based on these impositions, the projection of the *future* for the journalism career, through the view of respondents, both individually and collectively.

Since this is a qualitative research, the authors encountered a universe of meanings, both at the moment of data collection and later on, during the analysis. Therefore, based on the structuring of categories of analysis, content analysis was selected, particularly for the discovery of what was behind the expressed contents (GOMES, 2001). The simplified representation of raw data (BARDIN, 2016) was made using the "by boxes" procedure, where the content is divided into predetermined categories as data are found (BARDIN, 2016, p. 149). So, the content of the recorded and transcribed speeches was: a) collectively debated by the authors, who thoroughly reflected to seek the meanings present in the data; and b) systematic, following precepts of exhaustion, homogeneity, and relevance (BARDIN, 2016).

Ethical precepts in research involving human beings were observed, and participants received and signed an informed consent form.

Table 1
Characteristics of interviewees

Focus group	Pseudonyms	Age (years)	Time working in journalism (years)	Current activity
G1	Aurora	28	8	Journalist (*freelancer*[4])
	Bia	34	11	Journalist (CLT*)
	Carla	27	5	Journalist (*freelancer*)
	Antônio	34	6	Master brewer
	Bruno	30	11	Journalist (CLT)
	César	33	11	Journalist (CLT)
G2	Diana	33	14	Journalist (CLT)
	Elena	37	18	Press officer
	Fabiana	28	7	Law student
	Diego	32	12	Adman (CLT)
	Edu	37	18	Journalist (*freelancer*)
G3	Gabriela	33	+/- 12	Journalist (CLT)
	Gil	29	11	Press officer
	Gisela	35	14	Journalist (CLT)
	Heitor	33	10	Journalist (*freelancer*)
	Helena	33	14	Journalist (*freelancer*)
	João	38	17	Journalist (CLT)
	Joaquim	30	9	Journalist (CLT)

[4] Self-employed journalist who works for different companies or guide their works by projects, "attracting and serving their clients independently," (SILVA, 2014, p. 33-34) and may stay for long periods without formal employment. It is a common model in the media segment in general.

Focus group	Pseudonyms	Age (years)	Time working in journalism (years)	Current activity
G3	Gabriela	33	+/- 12	Journalist (CLT)
	Gil	29	11	Press officer
	Gisela	35	14	Journalist (CLT)
	Heitor	33	10	Journalist (*freelancer*)
	Helena	33	14	Journalist (*freelancer*)
	João	38	17	Journalist (CLT)
	Joaquim	30	9	Journalist (CLT)

* CLT = Consolidation of Labor Laws.

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Aligned with the theoretical assumption adopted by DeLuca and Rocha-de-Oliveira (2016) for studies on career, this paper seeks to understand, from the perspective of journalists that experienced collective redundancy, how they see the future of their profession and career given the transformations occurred. Thus, speeches were chronologically organized as: a) before layoffs; b) after collective redundancies; and c) projections for the career and profession.

Before layoffs: tolerance and acceptance

In order to understand how respondents recalled details of their professional life, it is worth mentioning that narratives refer to the period prior to the first downsizing mentioned by the interviewees, in December 2012. Note that, at the beginning of the 2000s, Brazilian Internet portals, which had arisen in the turn of the century, structured their newsrooms and professional practices in a proper way (FERRARI, 2002), thus becoming a new and promising market.

Satisfaction with the profession in the past is common for most respondents, with two exceptions (Antônio, Carla). The speeches include work experiences where moral harassment, long working hours, and unhealthy schedules are mentioned. However, such experiences are softened or tolerated when considering factors like acceptance, collective experience, environment of freedom and professional expression, evidencing purpose and meaning of work.

Aurora, for example, states that joining the company where she worked for was a dream come true due to the possibility of professional growth. Bia, on the other hand, suffered "*constant moral harassment*" in the beginning and questioned whether she would continue in such a "*horrible place, with frightening people.*" Her perception changed with the change of boss for one that was "*better, more qualified, more open to dialogue,*" with which she had affinity and received encouragement to do "*different and interesting things.*" Bruno, in his turn, describes the past as "*an enchanted moment*" when he got closer to professional achievement:

> [...][There was] spectacular freedom, which I had never seen before. There was no taboo subject, and I worked for more than one vehicle, and there are several... and a team that got along well. We felt fully satisfied to go to work, even though it was exhausting at times.

Despite the exhaustive working hours, Bruno "*thought it was great*" because he shared experiences with people he liked and with whom he created personal and affectional bonds. Aurora's narrative also reveals strong empathy with the group of colleagues. The reason, she wonders, was the fact that professional and personal lives were mixed: "*our* [personal] *relationships were all there.*" She gives an example: in case one of them did not receive an expected promotion, everybody would be disappointed.

With regard to the work performed, interviewees state that sometimes they would do socially relevant coverages, which made them proud and let them exercise their creativity and freedom of information, while other times they had to publish content whose only function was to attract massive audience. The gratification for the relevant work would offset the displeasure of doing something they did not like. João, for example, did not mind working long hours, exceeding the employment agreement

when he worked for a magazine in São Paulo, because he knew he "*would write an amazing article that would reverberate, that would be very well done, that people would read and comment.*"

The reports from this period stand out for their friendly moments, that is, the acceptance felt in daily relations, with acknowledgment and appreciation of the work done, which made the weariness of the intense work hours tolerable. The most optimistic mentions are about this moment, full of stories, where the construction of a career seemed possible, without fear of layoffs and precariousness.

The supportive environment starts to deteriorate when rumors about potential redundancies arise. Deteriorated labor relations in unsafe and uncertain environments (EKDALE, TULLY, HARMSEN et al., 2015) and precarious conditions, where the journalist must produce more in a shorter time, with fewer resources and fewer colleagues (BASTOS, 2015), appear in the speeches about the period after layoffs, which will be addressed next.

Layoff as a turning point: ruptures, helplessness, and precariousness

At this moment, respondents' perceptions from individual and contextual perspectives appear simultaneously or complementarily, indistinguishable in the logic of narratives. Inseparable in researches of organizations and careers (MAYRHOFER, MEYER and STEYRER, 2007), micro and macro aspects are included in the interviewee's speeches. What they mention happened from 2012, when organizational downsizing and layoffs started in the Brazilian press (SPAGNUOLO, 2015). Many people were affected, from workers in newspapers and magazines, which were losing readers for the Internet, to Internet portals, which were losing advertising income for social media and search engines (COSTA, 2014). The interviewees report poorly conducted redundancy processes, where lack of transparency strengthened rumors, generated anguish and increased suffering.

Among the 18 people interviewed, eight are employed as journalists (see Table 1). Five have not been able to get a formal job and work as freelancers (as interviewees call any temporary job). Fabiana and Antônio gave up on journalism and are building a career in other professions. Elena, Diego, and Gil work with non-journalistic social communication activities (public relations and advertisement); Elena and Diego wish to stay away from their original professions, and Gil plans to keep on working in related fields, using the "accumulated expertise" in journalism to "think about communication products."

Among those who left social communication, Antônio got a job at a craft brewery soon after he was made redundant and, in 2017, created his own beer brand. Fabiana had two experiences as a freelancer and, in the second one, she noticed from the beginning that she would not stand her boss, who was the "*very definition of moral harassment.*" On the day she learned 20 former colleagues were laid off, she decided to study Law. She became a student again and is currently a trainee in the field, which she admits "*not to love,*" but "*brings more perspective than journalism.*" Fabiana's choice echoes Heloani's (2005) observation that most journalists who want to change career intend to migrate to the legal field.

Bia, who made a resignation agreement after witnessing two organizational downsizing processes, declined the offer to work for a large newspaper that demands long working hours. She works for a small website on some weekends, relies on a cohesive team and is proud of the content produced:

> *I don't think that* [working with journalism] *will be a lifetime work, but it still makes me happy, still makes me willing to work, you know? Sometimes it is crap, but some days we create an amazing agenda* [...] *and you think "gee, how nice it is to do that"* (Bia).

One of the people interviewed by Heloani (2005, p. 165) classified journalism as "*a factory of crazy people.*" Bruno's metaphor is also extreme: "*it is a meat grinder.*" Bruno did not want to go back to the profession after having been fired and tried to join the Federal Police through a public service exam, only for stability. As he was not approved and had been unemployed for over a year, he returned to journalism. The same occurred to Aurora, who, after two years trying public service careers, was obliged to go back to the job market as a freelancer, "*with no desire at all.*" Joining a career as a civil servant is also seen as an alternative by César. He got another job after being dismissed, but, unhappy with the course of journalism, he studies for public service exams.

Opinions also converge regarding the type of job vacancies available and the flattening of salaries – to work "*too hard and earn too little,*" says Diana. The trend is to dismiss workers who have more experience and higher salaries, says Edu, who provides freelance services for a company earning less than what he used to earn six years earlier as an employee. Organizations employ

"kids" and pay them as little as possible, which they will "earn for ten years, 15 years of their lives," he says. Focus groups 2 and 3 identified a trend: companies have made more experienced workers redundant. For them, this trend weakens the newsrooms, eliminates memory, removes role models for the youngest professionals and renders expectation to continue in the area difficult for those who remain in it. João questions: "*I want to improve to be like that person, but what if that person was fired yesterday, where do I look to?*" Helena in turn considers that older colleagues who did not have a "*life outside the newspaper*" are helpless. She met a former boss, "*around 50 years old,*" living with the severance package money years after being laid off because he could not find a job. "*What can he do? A person at that age who wants to be a journalist and with such transition in journalism?*" Edu, in addition, says that he becomes sad when he sees colleagues working as app-based drivers. "*I don't hold anything against it! But we see too many journalists who can't get a position... and he became just an Uber driver.*"[5]

Diana, Edu, and João observe increasing accumulation of work over the last years. João, who did not mind working more in the past, because time would result in stories he was proud of, considers that layoffs force the survivors to work at a speed incompatible with quality. "*The chance of making mistakes is very high because there are too many tasks for such a short time,*" and the worker is less and less able to "*produce cool and relevant stories.*"

In addition to the reduction of job vacancies and the flattening of salaries, they say that the increased workload and accumulation of roles have been naturalized. Edu reports having seen a cameraman working as a driver of the journalism team. Companies have increasingly adopted "*an approach of labor exploitation,*" analyzes Joaquim, "*seeking to get the highest quality level of products and production from all their professionals,*" he concludes.

The interviewees see themselves disturbed by the speed of change in the journalism industry, which is unstable, influenced by many variables, and susceptible to sudden changes of focus. For Gil, the industry strives to survive as much as it can because the market is confused, consumption changed, and companies do not know what to do, "*they are lost.*" According to Bruno, it is more difficult to believe in a strategy when there are so many contradictory signs in sequence:

> *In one year, the company focuses on one thing, and it goes wrong. Then, they focus strictly on the opposite! Then you can see some wrong steps companies take because they still couldn't find a sustainable business model in journalism. That applies to companies and professionals.*

Narratives involving ruptures and helplessness, which leads to lack of hope are observed both in the period just before layoffs and after them. There are ambiguous feelings such as attraction (demonstrated by the expressions of appreciation and respect for the profession) and repulsion (showed in the desire to leave it). Changes caused by redundancies reinforce the suffering, especially due to the dismantling of affective personal bonds that helped them tolerate negative aspects and the difficulty to find a job that provides a future to the profession, as those who are older and experienced are dismissed by the companies. There were structural transformations that included successive processes of precariousness and affected journalists' work and their willingness to remain in the field. The next topic aims to show how the interviewees deal with their perspectives and journalism's given so many dilemmas.

Searching for ways out: projections for continuity in/of journalism

When envisioning the future, the interviewees' perspectives regarding career building (HUGHES, 1937) should be seen from the contextual understanding in Mayrhofer, Meyer, and Steyrer (2007). For Bia, facing the future unfolded by layoffs   brought unanswered questions:

> *Do I want to keep on working in journalism? What are the potential paths? Where should I go? What do I do?*

The interviewee's projections, particularly Bia's, Diana's, Diego's and Edu's, include fear, insecurity, and hopelessness. Bruno observes the frequency of words like "*violence,*" "*slavery,*" "*escape,*" "*fall,*" and "*to free*" in colleagues' speeches. For Bia, journalists start to live with these feelings when they think about the future, because they are helpless and deprived of

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[5] It is worth mentioning that, throughout this research, one of the authors used the service of an app-based driver who is a journalist. He is a reporter in a newspaper and sought an extra activity to complement his income, because the opportunities he had earlier, of doing freelance jobs in his spare time, disappeared.

guarantees as a freelancer and, as an employee, they are constantly threatened by redundancies; "*stability in journalism is not in CLT job,* [...] *is not in 'pejota,'⁶ is not in freelancing jobs. It doesn't exist!*" Gil's analysis follows the same course. For him, "*the anguish of uncertainty*" is a "*common denominator*" for both the employee, who can be dismissed at any moment, and the freelancer, who does not know whether they will have work to do. Added to that, there is his dissatisfaction with salaries: "*you look at people around you, people you socialize with, how much they have evolved financially, sometimes in their career, reaching positions and stuff. And you are there, without hope at all,*" observes Elena. For Joaquim, the business model adaptation to the new digital reality directly impacts on workers and demands more without providing financial return, such as pay raise, or more tranquility and better working conditions.

Hopelessness and frustration explain the alternative would be to leave journalism, as five of the interviewees did. Both freelancers, like Carla and Edu, and formal employees in the field, like Bruno, César, Gisela and João, consider leaving the activity. Edu justifies: "*I just have to find something else to make money. It's not about holding anything against journalism.*" Elena and Diego repeat the same expression: "*change completely,*" indicating that working as press relation and advertiser does not seem to be far enough from journalism. For Diana, "*slavery is not limited to communications vehicles.*" Like Aurora, Heitor, Joaquim, she is among the minority of four interviewees that do not see themselves working in the field in the future. Bia, Gabriela and Helena have doubts about continuing in the activity or not.

The pessimism with the scenario instability also marks the projections for the future of the profession. For Edu, it is widely known that "*the business model is in crisis,*" but nothing really new arises when companies try to innovate: "*there should be a turn, which is not happening.*" While they see the macro context imposing transformations, they realize that journalism has not changed enough to survive.

Among the difficulties that are far from the subjects' reach, Bruno predicts more models with freelancers, precarious labor relations, and absence of employment relationships. Pessimistically, Diana thinks that newsrooms filled with employees tend to disappear, leaving room for "*pejotas*" paid by clicks received in their stories.

For Aurora, it is "*nerve-racking to live only the present.*" She believes that employees ruled by the Consolidation of Labor Laws (CLT), even with exhaustive working hours, can think more about the future than self-employed workers: "*my friends who live on freelance jobs* [just] *survive* [...] *Those who have freelance jobs have no plans.*" If this trend is irreversible, Aurora strengthens her idea of leaving journalism,

> [...] *because you are not investing* [in the career], *you don't do anything that will bear a result later on. You will keep on doing that only, but it will take you nowhere.*

In addition to the accumulation of work and changes in how to do it, new technologies require more skills. For Edu, the journalist needs to expand his scope: "*you don't have to train only as a journalist, you have to train the guy who understands about the product, who knows how to sell.*" Moreover, he says one must know computer programming not to be subject to website developers or to the imposition of social media's algorithms. Diana adds the need to know about management and entrepreneurship.

In order to remain in journalism, one must seek a formal employment relationship, with long working hours, little freedom of expression and few chances to grow; or accept relations as a freelancer, which means accepting the absence of employment relationship, which is uncertain and precarious. Speeches evidence that the uncertainty about the future of journalism is inseparable from the perspectives of one's own career in the profession. While talking about leaving the activity, the interviewees also reflect on potential paths, based on the belief in the value and social importance of the profession, reinforcing its ambiguities and dilemmas.

Vulnerable careers: beyond the discussion on layoffs

Vulnerable means "susceptible to attack, defeat, harm or offense" (HOUAISS and VILLAR, 2001). Decades have passed since Dejours (2011, p. 16) stated that working populations seem "more vulnerable today than they were in the past." The interviewees' pessimism for the future refers to the fragility of labor relations. When echoing in the collectivity, changes in journalism and the lack of better perspectives affect workers and their careers, making them more susceptible to precariousness

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⁶ Slang word for journalists that create legal entities (PJ – *Pessoa Jurídica* in Portuguese) to render services to communication companies.

and helplessness (FIGARO, 2013; BASTOS, 2014, 2015; EKDALE, TULLY, HARMSEN et al., 2015; SHERWOOD and O'DONNELL, 2016; PPF, 2017). The observation finds support in Lancman (2011), who already pointed to the instability of the new labor relations that were taking form. This complex phenomenon is called vulnerable careers, which includes hopelessness, the impossibility of planning, loss of meaning of work, forced professional leaving, as well as their dilemmas and conflicts.

Building and maintaining a career in the profession seem something distant from the interviewees' experiences, whose speeches indicate two main intertwined and simultaneous aspects. The first mirrors individual dilemmas: given the broken labor ties and hopelessness, workers either seek options to continue in the profession or find room in their lives to invest in the transition. The second refers to the journalism context, where profession, market, and industry face different changes.

Among the main results found, precariousness is seen as inherent. It is not limited, however, to labor ties and rights, but it also extends in another direction: working conditions and personal relations, which are essential to face moral harassment, long working hours and unhealthy schedules. It is known that the discontinuation posed by informal service provision disturbs long lasting relations, hinders the creation of ties, affects the feeling of acceptance and belongingness, and separates the group (HELOANI, 2005).

The interviewees emphasized the importance of personal relations and the pleasure of working provided by freedom of expression in aspects that give purpose and meaning to work. Its dissolution leads to re-thinking the professional future. This is why many of those who are in the profession want to leave it, as they see few perspectives in this scenario, where companies fight to adapt to changes that have subverted its logics of sustenance. The attempts to adapt are always individual and are not regarded as collective solutions, as also found by Heloani (2005). The decision to leave lies with the individual, but the construction of new paths in the career is full of difficulties and dilemmas.

Another result common to Heloani's (2005) study is the contradictions that mark journalists' speeches about their profession. Speeches, sometimes hopeless, sometimes appreciative, indicate that the abandonment of the profession would not occur if the future perspectives were optimistic, since insecurity is not only related to the risk of losing the job but to the lack of hope to find a decent job. Thus, subject to defeat, workers and their careers face inevitable vulnerability.

Even when they try to plan potential paths for journalism, interviewees are pessimistic when considering the challenges of an industry whose changes are still occurring. The lack of definition increases anguish and suffering with the other dilemmas imposed. The results of this research lead to an approximation with the banking industry (more thoroughly studied), which underwent broad restructuring, including technologically. Organizational downsizing , instability, and insecurity, along with the emphasis on urgency and efficacy, led to work precariousness and practices that generate suffering, helplessness, and health issues among bank officers (LINHARES and SIQUEIRA, 2014; NASCIMENTO, DAMASCENO and NEVES, 2016; WEBER and GRISCI, 2011).

By taking personal responsibility for the consequences of such changes, professionals end up searching for overqualification, as demands for skills outside journalism like programming, sales, entrepreneurship and management are multiple. By criticizing the idea of assuming tasks that are not in the profession just to "save" the profession's purpose, Sandano (2015) recommends the opposite: one should reaffirm the meaning of journalism in the 21st century, recover its cognitive function and epistemological qualification[7]. When journalists immersed in uncertainties propose to acquire other skills, it is the professional identity itself that is dissolved.

As the profession is transformed, hopelessness and pessimism fade its meaning. In a context where careers are outlined (MAYRHOFER, MEYER and STEYRER, 2007), predictions made by the interviewees mirror the world of work, its technologies, and the nature of press as a business. The future planned by the worker is a projection of the current conditions: an irreversible process that cuts positions, worsens relations and increases workload. The pleasure of working diminishes compared to other fundamental spheres (like compensation, security, life quality) which now are absent in the profession. The lack of meaning is something that triggers defense mechanisms against suffering (SZNELWAR, 2011), and the weak labor ties of freelancing also jeopardize the establishment of collective strategies to face the issue, so important to Dejours (2011).

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[7] According to the author, epistemological qualification in journalism is "to learn how to narrate pain and humiliation, desires and perspectives of people other than ourselves," which requires "altruism" to be developed by "an empathic qualification to interpret (read) the world and be open to differences" (SANDANO, 2015, p. 171-173).

In this scenario, it seems inevitable for respondents to be expelled from the profession they chose (because of layoffs or because they believe that the older people are always fired) or to voluntarily give up on journalism. For Heloani (2005), journalists that persist in the activity do so for loving and fetishizing the profession, while others seek ways out for not standing the idea of postponing happiness.

Those who try to remain in the activity, according to respondents, are subject to precarious and oppressive conditions and watch the continuous retraction of the job market, which harms the expectation of a better future and forces the worker to leave the profession. According to Lancman (2011, p. 28), "the end of the stable work brings the loss of hope, the dream of ascension and social progress by means of work." Vulnerability, sooner or later, will reach journalists. An irreversible "collapse" is on its way and threatens democracy itself – since one of its pillars is a strong, free and independent press (MCCHESNEY, 2016, p. 2).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study started from the historical and spatial contextualization of collective redundancies, as experienced by respondents, to address how they were affected by this phenomenon. The understanding that individuals and contexts should be simultaneously addressed comes from the concepts of profession and career adopted (HUGHES, 1937; ABBOTT, 1988; MAYRHOFER, MEYER and STEYRER, 2007).

In a multifactorial conjuncture, layoffs proved to be the turning point that displaced professionals from their milieu, as an extreme symptom of changes that seem inevitable. Accordingly, the analysis of how journalists project their careers in the aftermath of collective redundancy process can increase the understanding of this phenomenon. Therefore, this study contributed at first by making the intersection of themes that are normally discussed separately: career, layoff, and labor relations. Second, by understanding redundancy as a turning point, it sought to expand this discussion, which is usually focused on the dismissal experience (VACLAVIK, PITHAN, AVILA et al., 2017a). Third, by using the turning point perspective, it also contributes to studies on career, as DeLuca and Rocha-de-Oliveira (2016) advocate. Moreover, since Business Administration studies on career have absolute endogenous predominance (VACLAVIK, PITHAN, SCHERER et al., 2017b), this paper brings a different contribution by expanding the analysis to the journalism field from a perspective that has had little interest to journalism: the worker's perspective (CHARRON and DE BONVILLE, 2016).

Finally, it also assists in filling a research gap by using micro and macro perspectives (ABBOTT, 1993) to study this profession that has been strongly affected by current transformations and is immersed in a complex, unstable and unpredictable scenario, which is rarely found in Administration studies in Brazil. We highlight that, given the multidisciplinary aspect and the range of job fields Administration encompasses, its studies should unfold the topics it investigates, which includes the themes researched in this paper – career, layoff, and labor relations intersected from micro and macro perspectives.

Further studies may deepen the analysis of the impacts of journalism transformations on Brazilian journalists, such as occurred with bank officers, by using larger samples of interviewees and also including people from other regions of the country. Moreover, studies involving journalism students can bring new perspectives as those were born in the digital information era. Because the sample of subjects includes only workers who experienced layoff due to organizational downsizing , there may have been a tendency to pessimism. Comparative research not focused on the turning point of redundancy and memory recall, as in this study, can add to the understanding of the phenomenon. Such suggestions address the limitations of this study, which was made with 18 journalists from one specific region.

The concern that the massive introduction of technology in the workplaces will affect jobs and the number of positions available is not recent. However, given a scenario where practices increasingly precarious are disseminated, as occurs in the work organization in the gig economy, it is appropriate to refer to Balaram, Warden, and Wallace-Stephens (2017): at a time when social inequalities and growing fears concerning the impact of technology on the world of work are observed, it is necessary to reinforce a movement to return to basic questions on what is needed to enjoy a decent living standard in a broad sense. Given its exploratory character, this paper, far from reaching conclusions, intends to raise questions about contemporary labor relations that are not limited to the journalism activity, hoping that alternative paths will be built, which may be able to obtain advantages from technology.

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