

The Promotion of Accreditation of Prior Learning Processes in Firms: Impact on the Worker-Organization Relationship

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Abstract

The process of Competences Recognition, Validation and Certification², also known as Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL), is an innovative means of attaining school certificates for individuals without an academic background. The main objective of this process is to validate what people have learned in informal contexts, in order to attribute academic certificates.

With the increasing interest of the qualification of workers and governmental support, more and more Portuguese organizations promote this process within their facilities and their work hours. ~~In fact, nowadays, various Portuguese firms reveal a special concern about learning issues as a key factor in their competitiveness. Consequently, they tend to invest in strategies oriented towards the enhancement of human resource competences to improve their learning ability and their performance.~~

This study explores the relationship between the promotion of this Human Resource Development Programme and employee's attitudes (Job Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment) and behaviours (Extra-role Organizational Citizenship Behaviours) towards the organization they work for. Results of a cross-sectional survey of Portuguese Industrial Workers (N=135) showed that statistical significant results are in the higher levels of Voice Behaviours (a dimension of Extra-role Organizational Citizenship Behaviour ~~defined as the proactive behaviors that challenge the status quo in order to improve Organizational Performance~~) in the groups of workers who were involved or had graduated from the firm promoted APL process.

Introduction

In an era where the learner's earlier educational experiences do not always fit with the reality of a rapidly changing employment market, and jobs are not "for life", accompanied by high rates of experience and knowledge redundancy, along with other contributory discontinuities in career patterns (Dealtry, 2003), the importance of lifelong learning is stressed, conveying to the pertinence of a competence-based approach to learning.

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² In Portuguese, "Reconhecimento, Validação e Certificação de Competências" (RVCC).

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That is to say that not only there is a need to constantly develop new competences but also it has become more and more pertinent to recognize and validate the ones acquired in non-formal and informal contexts.

The term “competence” assumes in this context a primary role, as it has become a more and more used term. It can be defined in several ways, taking in account two main components: *savoir-mobiliser*³ (Perrenoud, 1996), and *reflexive attitude*, because the validated experiences in this kind of processes are characterized by the knowledge acquired by a long practice together with observation and reflexion (Fredy-Pinchot, 2004).

Learning is therefore no longer a preparing exercise from which to launch into a career but an essential activity of career sustaining and growth (Dealtry, 2003).

The Accreditation of Prior Learning is a process that strives to assess and recognize the non-formally⁴ attained knowledge. Usually, the subjects are asked to demonstrate a set of competences referenced as core to the specific qualification they are aiming at. This demonstration can have practical elements (such as the French *bilan de compétences*) but it usually consists of a portfolio of activities in which the adults demonstrate certain set of competences (e.g. correct use of language, mathematical competences, etc.).

In Europe, despite the differences among the countries that have adopted accreditation and validation of prior learning systems, there are connecting common basis and common features, along with an apparent trend to the further promotion of this kind of validation in other countries as a key point of life-long learning (Colardyn & Bjornavold, 2004)⁵.

The role of learning validation and accreditation systems is related to the demand for more co-creative quality assurance solutions in corporate and organizational learning management (Dealtry, 2003), including the need for a more holistic vision of human resources management perspective. As we have already said, nowadays, firms

³ As opposed to the traditional *savoir-faire*, pointing to the integration and even synergy of the resources a competence weighs upon, in the sense that it means mobilising a group of resources – knowledge, attitudes, personal traits, etc. to a certain purpose.

⁴ By “non formal” we mean both the informal, experience-based learning and the non-formal courses that one may attend that are not accredited.

⁵ In Europe, there are APL processes in countries such as Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and the UK, but the process is not exclusively European, existing also in other Continents, in countries like, Chile, Canada, Malaysia, Korea, USA, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, etc., although having different acronyms such as APEL (Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning), RPEL (Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning), PLAR (Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition), etc.

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reveal a special concern about learning issues as a key factor in their competitiveness. Consequently, they tend to invest in strategies oriented towards the enhancement of human resource competences to improve their learning ability and their performance. Supporting this investment, a study conducted by Rebelo (2006) reveals that workers' qualification is a strong facilitator of the existence of a learning culture in organizations, the type of culture that a leaning organization must have. The results of this study also support that a learning culture has a positive impact on organizational performance.

~~The Process of Accreditation of Prior Learning can be developed in a number of contexts, like refugee camps, centres for the general population, enterprises and organizations, etc.~~

In Portugal, this process is carried out by institutions accredited by the same Ministry, called New Opportunities Centres⁶, in their own facilities or in organizations that require them to itinerate there. Here, the Accreditation of Prior Learning is designed only to attribute school qualifications (4th, 6th, 9th and, more recently, 12th year of education equivalences) through a process that involves the attendance of APL sessions where candidates show some oral communication and citizenship competencies, as well as the completion of a Personal and Professional Portfolio, where significant past experiences and informally acquired competencies are reported. No previous level of school attendance is required for any of the levels of accreditation, as long as the adults prove to possess the competencies referred by the Portuguese Education Ministry in the law.

~~In particular, firms have been interested in this kind of validation of their Human Resources within different schemes and organizational philosophies, cultures and strategies, as can be seen in Table 1.~~

⁶ "Centros de Novas Oportunidades", in Portuguese.

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~~Table 1—Factors that impact on the operationalization of the APL process [Adapted from MEFI (2004) and Pette & Devin (2005)]~~

Corporate Choice	Dominant Aspect	Aimed Main Impact
Individual—logic (case-by-case)	Social/motivational	Social acknowledgement of the offer to the workers by the company; Individual Motivation
	Individualized—HR management	Ability to evolve and manage competences; Evolution Ability
Collective—Logie (profession, function, position...)	Collective—<i>mise en oeuvre</i> of the APL	Accompany the professional evolutions; Professionalizing.
	Organizational	To operationalize choices and reconfigure the structure Revalidating of the job/function.
	Economic	Developing an image in the competitors landscape (enhancing a brand image of quality).
	Employability	Improving the positioning in the labour market

The APL process in companies does not necessarily entail a formalised strategic plan. ~~The possible consequences on the workers' careers are not a fruit of the validation per se (but of the acquisition of competences implied by it) and most of the companies involved do not even acknowledge that are managing by competences (Layec & Leguy, 2006). In fact, this seems to be much more a *de facto* rather than *de jure* process, in the sense that it brings about a series of issues (like Corporate Social Responsibility, Management by Competences, Management by Values, Organizational Learning Management, etc.) that are not always recognized by the actors of the process themselves.~~

Nonetheless, it is evident that this process intended as a Human Resources Development (HRD) instrument or not, impacts on the workers that submit to it. Studies have shown that the APL impacts mainly on the candidates' self-representation (e.g., Layec & Leguy, 2006, François & Botteman, n.d., Prodercom, 2004, CIDEDEC, 2004), but also on their representation of the company and its proximity towards them (Layec & Leguy, 2006).

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~~In our study, we intend~~ This study aims to at investigate-investigating the impact of this process in the relationship of Workers with the Firms they work for.

Because the Worker-Organization Relationship is such a wide subject, we chose two types of Job Attitudes (particularly Organizational Commitment and Job Satisfaction), and one type of Behaviours (namely Extra-Role Organizational Citizenship Behaviours) as the variables in study. This choice was both consistent with the few studies on APL in firms we have found (that pointed out these variables as affected by APL) and with the literary review we conducted, where these three particular variables often appear together.

Our perspective was therefore to look into the Worker-Organization relationship in three different angles: of the Worker with the Job itself (Job Satisfaction); of the Worker's attachment to the Organization (Organizational Commitment) and of the Worker's actual self-report of going beyond his or her job for the good of the Organization (Extra-Role Organizational Citizenship Behaviours).

Job Satisfaction

Job Satisfaction has been the focus of thousands of studies and published articles in industrial-organizational psychology (Resnick & Bond, 2001) and can be defined "simply how people feel about different aspects of their jobs" (Spector, 1997, p.2).

Research has positively associated Job Satisfaction with the specific attributes and occupations of the job, positive attitudes, motivation and life-happiness, leisure and non-work environment (Tennison, 1996). We hypothesize that Job Satisfaction will increase with the valuing of the workers competences by the APL process, given the likelihood of improvement of the positive attitudes, motivation and life-happiness, commonly associated with a better self-concept (CIDEDEC, 2004).

Also, since self-efficacy⁷, one of the main reported results of the APL process (e.g. CIDEDEC, 2004) is associated with internal control Locus of Control⁸, and Job

⁷ Defined here as the tendency to consider oneself competent (Spector, 1997).

⁸ Locus of Control is a cognitive variable that represents an individual's generalized belief in his or her ability to control positive and negative reinforcements in life. An internal locus of control leads the subjects to believe that they are able to influence reinforcements (Spector, 1997)

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Performance⁹ aspects reported to relate positively with job satisfaction (O'Brien, 1983, Spector, 1982, cit in Spector, 1997), it is plausible to hypothesize that:

Hypotheses 1a: *Workers that have concluded the APL process promoted in their firms will reveal higher Job Satisfaction compared to those workers who are not engaged in this process.*

Hypotheses 1b: *Workers that are doing the APL processes promoted in their firms will reveal higher Job Satisfaction compared to those workers who are not engaged in this process.*

Organizational Commitment

In the last decades, the concept of Organizational Commitment (OC) has grown in popularity in the literature of industrial/organizational psychology and organizational behavior (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990).

Despite the different definitions and measurements of OC, there is some agreement that it can be considered as a bond that links the individual to the organization and that it is inversely related to turnover and withdrawal intentions (Fields, 2002; Allen & Meyer, 1990), although it is obviously very reductive to consider that Organizational Commitment is only related to focal intentions to remain with the organization (Meyer and Allen, 1997).

For present purposes, and albeit the different existing OC models (e.g. Mowday, Porter and Steers, 1982; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986), we adopted Meyer and Allen's (1991, 1997; Allen & Meyer, 1990) three component model. It is defensible that Meyer and Allen's (1991, 1997; Allen & Meyer, 1990) is the most studied and empirically supported model, prevailing in the literature (Bergman, 2006; Meyer et al., 2002). Also it has already been explored in diverse contexts and cultures, despite the prevalence of the North American reality (cf. Meyer & Allen, 1996).

Meyer and Allen (1991) conceptualize OC divided in three components (rather than types, since they can co-exist): Affective, Normative and Continuance Organizational Commitment.

Affective Organizational Commitment can be defined as the emotional attachment with the organization and is related with the worker-organization

⁹ Job Performance is defined here as *how well the person does at the job*.

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identification; Normative Organizational Commitment is the perceived obligation (ethical or moral) to remain in the organization and, finally, the Continuance Organizational Commitment is defined as the perceived costs of leaving the organization (such as lost of seniority or lower pay).

Literally hundreds of studies have examined the relationships between Affective Organizational Commitment (AOC) and variables hypothesized to be its antecedents (Meyer & Allen, 1997). In terms of Organizational Variables, AOC seems to be positively related to the way organizational-level policies are designed, communicated and perceived as fair.

Overall, the relationship between demographic variables and affective commitment are neither strong nor consistent (Meyer & Allen, 1997); Dispositional variables, however, have shown different results, in particular, there is some evidence that suggests that people's perceptions of their own competence might play an important role in the development of AOC (Meyer and Allen, 1997). Of the several personal characteristics that they examined, Mathieu and Zajac (1990) reported the strongest link between perceived competence and affective commitment, which leads us to the following hypotheses:

Hypotheses 2a: *Workers that have concluded the APL process promoted in their firms will reveal higher Affective Organizational Commitment compared to those workers who are not engaged in this process.*

Hypotheses 2b: *Workers that are doing the APL processes promoted in their firms will reveal higher Affective Organizational Commitment compared to those workers who are not engaged in this process.*

Normative Organizational Commitment (NOC) has been conceptualized to develop upon several processes. The “psychological contract” between an employee and the organization plays an important role to the emergence of this kind of OC (Argyris, 1960; Rousseau, 1989, 1995; Schein, 1980, cit in Meyer & Allen, 1997). A particular type of investment that the organization makes in the employee – specifically, investments that seem difficult for employees to reciprocate also appear highly correlated with the advent of NOC (Meyer & Allen, 1991), which leads us to the following hypotheses:

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Hypotheses 2c: *Workers that have concluded the APL process promoted in their firms will reveal higher Normative Organizational Commitment compared to those workers who are not engaged in this process.*

Hypotheses 2d: *Workers that are doing the APL processes promoted in their firms will reveal higher Normative Organizational Commitment compared to those workers who are not engaged in this process.*

Continuance Commitment has been shown to be related to employees' perceptions about the transferability of their *skills* (Allen & Meyer, 1990) and their *education* (Lee, 1992, cit in Meyer & Allen, 1997) to other organizations. Both Allen & Meyer (1990) and Lee (1992, cit in Meyer & Allen, 1997) demonstrated that employees who thought their educational or training investments were less easily transferable elsewhere expressed stronger continuance commitment to their current organization. Also, Continuance Commitment is positively influenced by employee's *recognition* that leaving is more costly due to the investments made in favour of the organization (*side bets*) and/or the perceived lack of available alternatives.

Thus, and given the fact that the APL process increases the educational level and Global Self-Esteem (e.g. CIDEA, 2004), it is reasonable to hypothesize that:

Hypotheses 2e: *Workers that have concluded the APL process promoted in their firms will reveal lower Continuance Organizational Commitment compared to those workers who are not engaged in this process.*

Hypotheses 2f: *Workers that are doing the APL processes promoted in their firms will reveal lower Continuance Organizational Commitment compared to those workers who are not engaged in this process.*

Extra-Role Organizational Citizenship Behaviour

Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) can be defined as an individual behaviour that is *discretionary*, not contractually guaranteed and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization (Organ, 1997; Smith, Organ & Near, 1983).

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Organizational Citizenship Behaviour is *discretionary* in the sense that it is not an enforceable requirement of the role or the job description, but a matter of personal choice (such that its omission is generally not understood as punishable) and by “not contractually guaranteed” we mean that an OCB is not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system (Organ, 1997).

This construct, however fashionable at the moment, has been much debated over time due to the concepts of in-role and extra-role behaviour. Although some of the original articles referred to OCB as extra-role behaviours, further research verified that much of the OCB's were perceived by the workers as in-role, rather than extra-role (cf. Morrison, 1994), a question that inheres the very fuzziness of the concepts “role” and “job” themselves (Organ, 1997).

In order to avoid the discussion between what employees could consider in-role or extra-role and to distance ourselves from a discussion that is not the focus of this study, we chose to approach this subject by restricting our research to the impact of the APL process to Extra-role Behaviour, using Van Dyne and LePine's (1998) model, “Helping and Voice Behaviors” (exposed further on). Also, these were the most reported changed variables after the APL process in firms (e.g. CIDEDEC, 2004, Layec & Leguy, 2006).

Helping Behavior is defined as the proactive behavior that emphasizes small acts of consideration towards other co-workers, and Voice Behaviors are the proactive behaviors that challenge the status quo in order to improve Organizational Performance. Both are seen as extra role behaviors that the employees may undertake at their own time (Fields, 2002).

Ng and Van Dyne (2005) refer that the psycho-social antecedents of Help Behaviors are essentially *group cohesion* - defined as “the result of all the forces acting on the members to remain in the group” (Festinger, 1950, cit in Ng & Van Dyne, 2005) and *cooperative group norms* (norms can be defined as regular behavior patterns that are relatively stable over time and expected by group members [Bettenhausen & Murnighan, 1991, cit in Ng & Van Dyne, 2005]). Since training as well as the APL process (given the unquestionability of the contextual similarities) provides a socialization context, promoting further socialization opportunities and even solidarity among its members (cf. Geerthuis et al, 2002; Kontoghiorghes & Bryant, 2004), we propose the following hypotheses:

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Hypotheses 3a: *Workers that have concluded the APL process promoted in their firms will report higher Help Behaviours compared to those workers who are not engaged in this process.*

Hypotheses 3b: *Workers that are doing the APL processes promoted in their firms will report higher Help Behaviours compared to those workers who are not engaged in this process.*

Relatively to Voice Behaviours, LePine and Van Dyne (1998) stress the relevance of Satisfaction with the Group and Global Self Esteem as antecedents of this variable.

In most organizations, the most proximal work-related source of affect for employees is their group: when employees must interact with others in their work group to perform their jobs, their affective response to this interdependence can be a major source of low and/or high satisfaction (Hackman, 1992, cit in LePine & Van Dyne, 1998). Global Self Esteem, on the other hand, (which can be thought of in terms of self-confidence and generalized self-competence [Tharenou, 1979 cit in LePine & Van Dyne, 1998]) is an important predictor of attitudes and behaviour in work and nonwork contexts (Brockner, 1988, cit in LePine & Van Dyne, 1998).

If we consider that one of the main findings on the CIDEDEC (2004) study on the impact of the APL process in the Portuguese Population was the increase of the Global Self Esteem¹⁰, due to a greater awareness of each individual's own competences and know-how, we are led to formulate the following hypotheses:

Hypotheses 3c: *Workers that have concluded the APL process promoted in their firms will report higher Voice Behaviours compared to those workers who are not engaged in this process.*

Hypotheses 3d: *Workers that are doing the APL processes promoted in their firms will report higher Voice Behaviours compared to those workers who are not engaged in this process.*

¹⁰ Despite specific to the Portuguese Population, these findings are supported by other studies conducted abroad such as Coladryn & Bjornavold (2004), Fredy-Pinchot (2004), CIDEDEC (2004), MEFI (2004) Layec & Leguy (2006), etc.

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Method

Sample and data collection procedures

Data was collected from employees in two industrial organizations. The two firms we did our research in are major industrial companies of the automobile and contract manufacturing business, with about 600 and 1000 workers respectively.

These Organizations were selected to conduct the study in view of the fact that APL Processes had already occurred and were currently taking place in both firms. This was an important factor, due to the nature of our study, where more or less equally distributed groups of subjects in three different stages of the APL process (not involved, involved and graduated from it) were needed.

About 150 questionnaires were distributed in the two firms. ~~Circa-Around~~ 50% of the questionnaires were collected directly by the authors in both firms, whereas the remaining were distributed, grouped and returned to the authors by collaborators of the Human Resources department of the firms in sealed envelopes, due to organizational internal security policies.

Of these 150 questionnaires, about 90% (N=135) were completed and returned. ~~Specifically, the questionnaires completed and returned were, in the contract manufacturing company 96% (N=47) of the originally planned, whereas in the automobile industry it was 88% (N=88).~~

The sample is comprised of employees in production (60,7%), clerical (5,2%) and supervisory (17%) positions (17,1% of the subjects did not respond this item). Males comprised 70,4% of the sample, ~~females, 28,1% and 1,5% of the subjects did not respond this item.~~ Workers comprised by this sample were between 27 and 59 years old ~~with a mean age of (mean=42,5 years and a standard deviation of, SD=6,95).~~ ~~The nature of the inquired subjects contracts was as follows: 89,5% had effective contracts, 8,9% had termed contracts, 2,2% had temporary contracts, 0,7% had other types of agreement and 2,2% did not respond this item. Seniority of the inquired subjects varied between 0 and 40 years, with a mean of 17,7 years and a standard deviation of 10,7.~~

According to the objectives of present research, the sample was divided in three groups regarding the level of involvement in the APL process: not involved (31,1%), currently involved (40%) and graduated from it (28,9%).

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Measures

Job Satisfaction was assessed using the short version of the MSQ - Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (Weiss, Dawis, England & Lofquist, 1967), with 20 items. A 5-point Likert-type scale was answered in which choices range from “very dissatisfied with this aspect of my job” (1) to “very satisfied with this aspect of my job” (5). ~~This instrument was chosen for being well known and stable over the time, widely studied and validated, reporting coefficient alpha values ranging from .85 to .91 from previous researches (cf. Mathiew and Farr, 1991, Moorman, 1993, Hart, 1999, etc. cit in Fields, 2002), besides being a rather parsimonious scale:~~

Employees’ levels of commitment to their organization were measured using the revised version of Meyer and Allen’s (1997) 19 item scale: Affective, Normative and Continuance Commitment Scale (Meyer & Allen, 1997). ~~A 7 point Likert type scale was used for measuring respondents’ level of agreement with each statement (from 1 –strongly disagree to 7 –strongly agree). In the authors’ version, the Affective Commitment Subscale contains 6 items, the Normative Commitment Subscale integrates 6 items, and the Continuance Commitment Subscale integrates 7 items. The choice of this instrument was dictated by the fact it referred to the most consensuous model in the revised literature (e.g. Bergman, 2006).~~

Extra-Role Organizational Citizenship Behaviour was assessed using the 13-item Helping and Voice Behaviours Scale (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). Responses to all items were assessed on 7-point scales (1 -strongly disagree to 7 - strongly agree). ~~The Helping Behaviours original subscale contains 7 items and the Voice Behaviours subscale integrates 6 items. This scale was chosen due to the fact that it was parsimonious (13 items), specific (regarding solely two dimensions of OCB’s) and permitted self report.~~

Analysis

To test our hypotheses, we used a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) design to analyse the data. The independent variables were the three different levels of APL Process Development (not involved, currently involved and

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graduated from it). The dependent variables were Job Satisfaction (2 types: Internal and External Satisfaction), Organizational Commitment (3 components: Affective, Normative and Continuance Commitment) and Extra-Role Organizational Citizenship Behaviours (2 types: Helping Behaviours and Voice Behaviours). Our primary interest in the MANOVA design was to test for the overall statistical difference of the main effect and interaction terms. We subsequently used Games-Howell as a *post hoc* procedure to examine the substantive nature of main effect differences when they were found to be statistically significant, given the fact that Levene's test did not reveal equality of variances between the groups (Pestana & Gageiro, 2005).

Results and Discussion

MANOVA was used for the analysis with the sequential adjustment for nonorthogonality, in the case of Helping and Voice Behaviours (since they were positively rather than orthogonally correlated). ~~The total N was reduced from 135 to 131 for Job Satisfaction, 126 for Organizational Commitment and 129 for Helping and Voice Behaviours, due to the deletion of severe outlier cases.~~

With the use of Wilk's criterion, we found the set of Helping and Voice Behaviours to be significantly affected by the participation on the APL Process ($\Lambda=0,880$, $F_{(4, 240)}=3,943$, $p=0,04$, $\eta^2= 0,062$). However, univariate tests revealed significant differences to be specifically in Voice Behaviours, and Games-Howell *post hoc* procedure that these difference were between the workers who had already graduated and the workers not involved in the process (mean difference = ,79 for $p= 0,006$), as well as the workers currently involved versus the workers not involved in the APL process (mean difference = ,67 for $p= 0,03$).

There was no statistically significant multivariate effect for Job Satisfaction ($\Lambda=0,987$, $F_{(4, 252)}= 0,405$; $p=0,805$, $\eta^2= 0,006$) or Organizational Commitment ($\Lambda=0,973$, $F_{(6, 240)}= 0,555$; $p=0,766$, $\eta^2= 0,014$).

Hence, workers who are currently undergoing the APL process as well as workers who have graduated from the APL process seem to display higher levels of proactive behaviors that challenge the status quo in order to improve Organizational Performance (Voice Behaviors).

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Table 7 – Averages and Standard Deviations of Job Satisfaction (Intrinsic and Extrinsic Job Satisfaction), Organizational Commitment (Affective Organizational Commitment, Normative Organizational Commitment, and Continuance Organizational Commitment) and Extra-Role Organizational Citizenship Behaviours (Helping Behaviours and Voice Behaviours) as a function of the status in face of the APL Process.

Variable	Intrinsic Job Satisfaction N=134		Extrinsic Job Satisfaction N=134		Affective Organizational Commitment N=132		Normative Organizational Commitment N=132		Continuance Organizational Commitment N=132		Help Behaviours N=133		Voice Behaviours N=133	
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
APL Status														
Not involved	4,00	,643	3,61	,844	5,39	1,44	4,63	1,332	4,97	1,452	5,93	,773	5,21	1,354
Involved	3,94	,695	3,49	,778	5,50	1,10	4,35	1,538	4,97	1,302	5,99	,825	5,88	,904
Graduated from it	4,04	,496	3,62	,590	5,63	,87	4,51	1,144	4,89	,874	6,20	,572	6,00	,677

Although the Multivariate Analysis of Variance yielded statistical significance only in terms of Voice Behaviours, tendencies of the variables generally don't seem to strand from what had been hypothesized, as one can observe in the following graphics.

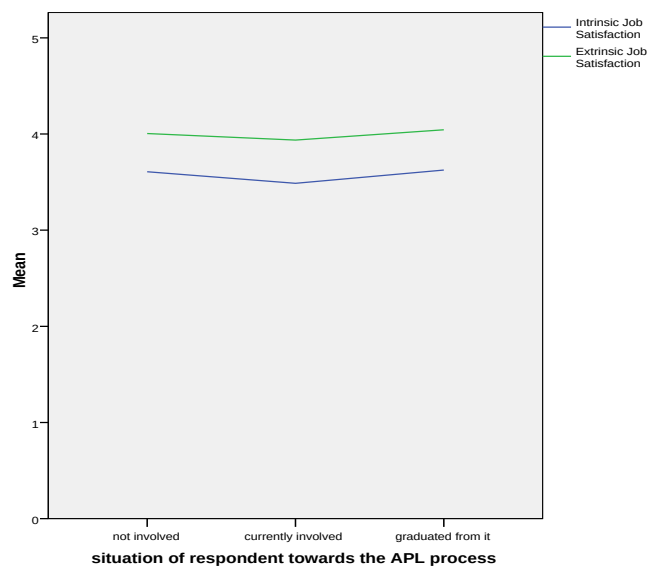


Figure 1 - Graphical depiction of the differences between the three levels of APL process situation in terms of the two dimensions of Job Satisfaction

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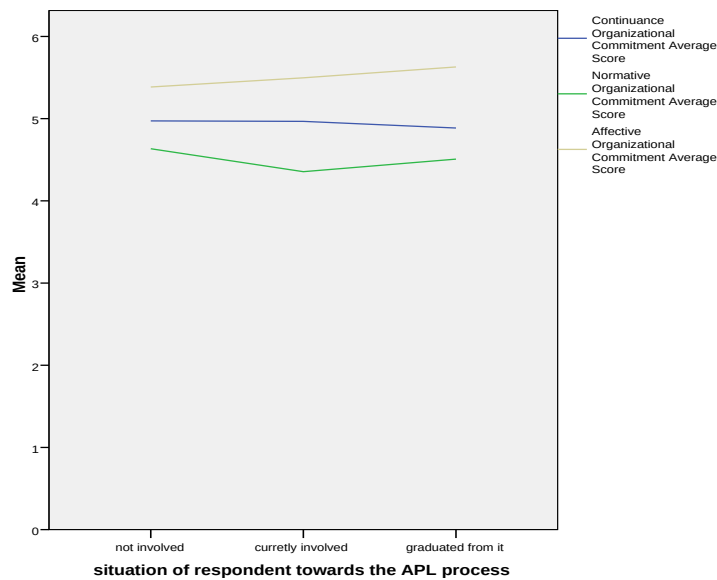


Figure 2 - Graphical depiction of the differences between the three levels of APL process situation in terms of the three components of Organizational Commitment

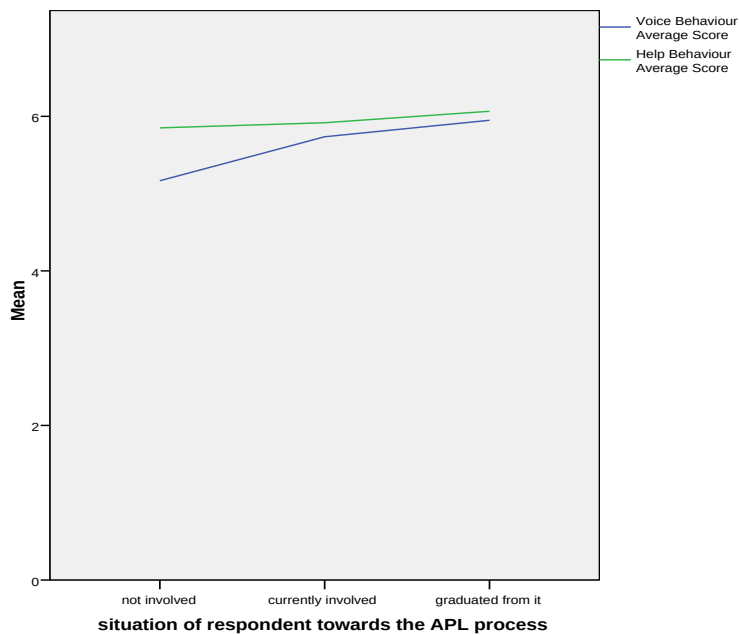


Figure 3 - Graphical depiction of the differences between the three levels of APL process situation in terms of the two levels of Helping and Voice Behaviours

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Discussion

Although Accreditation of Prior Learning has existed in Portugal since 2003, and there are increasingly more studies about the impact of the process, there was a void in the investigation of how this process effects on firms. The research that does exist focuses on the individual and on educational features that APL implies. Our research presents a first effort to understand the implications of this Human Resource Development instrument in the functioning of organizations, having, in this sense, a primary character.

Drawing from Social Exchange Theory (Homans, 1958, Gouldner, 1960, Blau, 1964, cit in Coyle-Shapiro et al., 2004), and more specifically from Psychological Contracts literature (e.g. Rousseau, 1995), it is proposed that employees would most likely want to reciprocate the companies' interest in their development with higher levels of Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour. We verified that although, generally, variables (with the clear exception of the Normative Organizational Commitment) reported the expected tendency, as is visible in the graphics in the Results section, statistical significance was only found in Voice Behaviours, the proactive behaviors that challenge the status quo in order to improve Organizational Performance, namely, in terms of involvement in matters which affect the quality of life in the group and in keeping well informed about issues where one's opinion might be useful to the work group.

This finding, although somewhat different from what we had predicted, makes sense in view of the fact that all the studies that we consulted (Coladryn & Bjornavold, 2004, Fredy-Pinchot, 2004, CIDEDEC, 2004, MEFI, 2004, Layec & Leguy, 2006, etc.) point out that the absolute main effect of the APL process in the individual is the boost in self confidence, self-concept and self esteem, which in it's turn is the major antecedent of Voice Behaviours (Van Dyne & LePine, 1998).

Although our original propositions make sense, there can be covariates that we have not accounted for. The well known demand of the modern labour market that encourages workers to practice lifelong learning can also be seen as a demand with a direct enforcement by the companies (e.g., workers who don't keep evolving don't progress in their careers and are more likely to be fired); this may bring about a sense of necessity rather than opportunity to initiatives like promoting the APL Process in the

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company, therefore associating pressure and a sense of obligation to it. In this context, the worker may see the APL process not as something that is being offered but as something that is being implicitly demanded of him or her, thus altering the sense of the ongoing social exchange and reducing the feeling of moral obligation to remain in the organization (Normative Commitment), usually preceded by feelings of owing towards the employer/organization. Currently, in both companies, although the APL sessions are done on the workers after work hours, sessions are held in company premises, making it visible to administration and colleagues whether or not workers are developing this qualification effort.

This might explain to some extent also why workers don't seem to change their attitudes in a statistically significant manner (Job Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment), although interestingly enough, they modify their behaviours (Voice Behaviours, in this case) in a way that is positive for the firm.

It is also important to mark that both firms registered very high levels of Job Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment *a priori* making it, on the one hand, less probable that those variables increased significantly and on the other hand, suggesting that the companies promote other Human Resource Management measures that due to temporal antecedence or other reasons may account for those higher levels.

Conclusions

It is commonly accepted in the management literature that organizations need employees who are willing to exceed their formal job requirements (Barnard, 1938; Katz, 1964; Katz & Kahn, 1978; cit in Morrison, 1994).

This study has shown that firm promoted Accreditation of Prior Learning has a impact in the workers pro-active behaviour towards Organizational Performance. Workers who have had their competences validated and workers involved in APL tend to display a higher involvement in matters which affect the quality of life in their group, and make a larger effort to keep themselves well informed about issues where their opinion might be useful to their work group.

We believe that the clues provided by the present study will contribute to the research of APL as a blooming new valid approach to life-long learning, organizational learning management and human resource development practice.

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In practical terms we hope our contribution will aid the improvement of the use and implementation of APL processes in Portuguese firms, since it has become clear that there are some positive changes in the Worker-Organization relationship.

Limitations and Directions for future investigation

One of the limitations of the present study is its cross-sectional design. So, for future research, we think it would be interesting to make a longitudinal study, with this population, in order to understand the evolutions of these and other dependent variables that could be relevant (such as the innovations of workers in their work context). Also, there is another status concerning the APL process that due to circumstantial constraints could not be included in this study: the workers who have started the APL process but that for one reason or another didn't conclude it, that is to say, gave up. Does the Worker-Organization Relationship suffer any changes? And if so, what are they?

We also think it would be very interesting to understand how the reverse relationship (Organization-Worker) is affected by the APL process, e.g., since we found that workers who had finished successfully the APL process reported higher levels of Voice Behaviours, does that mean that companies tend to empower their workers more, after they validated their informal and non-formal competencies?

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