

# Who wants to be a Coordinator? Succession Practices in Brazilian Graduate Programs in Accounting

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## Abstract

**Objective:** To investigate the formal and informal strategies used by Brazilian graduate programs in accounting to prepare for coordinator succession.

**Method:** Data were collected through a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with coordinators of Brazilian accounting graduate programs.

**Results:** One of the main findings is the presence of a talent pool largely composed of former coordinators. Other faculty members rarely express interest in assuming the coordination role. Therefore, although capable professionals exist, in most cases there is little motivation to assume the position, suggesting limited incentives for the role. Only one program reported having a structured succession planning process, consisting of pedagogical and administrative courses offered by the university, although these courses had a generic scope.

**Contributions:** The findings provide insights into the factors influencing the attraction and retention of faculty members in coordination roles in accounting graduate programs, contributing to the sustainability of graduate education in the field.

**Keywords:** Succession planning; Graduate programs; Academic leadership; Accounting education.

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## 1 Introduction

Studies on succession date back to the 1960s, when early research focused primarily on family businesses; however, within academic settings the topic remains underexplored and is largely limited to a small number of studies in medical fields in the United States, focusing on replacing academic leaders and faculty approaching retirement (Amburgh et al., 2010; Luna, 2012; Fang & Kesten, 2017; Skarpuski et al., 2018; Baker et al., 2018). Amburgh et al. (2010) identified a shortage of qualified faculty replacements and deficiencies in planning as the main concerns within succession planning processes.

In Brazil, concerns about the shortage of faculty in graduate programs in accounting arise primarily from the limited attractiveness of the academic job market and the imminent retirement of researchers currently working in the field. These factors can compromise graduate programs if a strategic succession planning process is not implemented. Lima (2021) notes that accounting professionals tend to value careers in the corporate sector, which offers more competitive remuneration.

Thus, the discussion of succession in graduate programs in accounting extends beyond the shortage of faculty, as it encompasses the filling of administrative positions and academic roles. Succession in the academic sphere is directly related to the continuity of research, the structuring of courses, the allocation of graduate supervision, and leadership roles in representative entities such as the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES), the National Association of Graduate Programs in Accounting Sciences (AnpCont), as well as journal editorships. Issues related to the selection of new program coordinators and department heads fall within the administrative domain.

Specifically in public institutions, when faculty members are unable to assume coordination roles, the challenge becomes even more complex due to the impossibility of immediate external hiring. Therefore, succession planning is essential, enabling the early identification of faculty members interested in coordination roles, enables the creation of a talent pool, and prepares future faculty members (Tucker, 2020).

The lens through which succession is examined in this study is an analogy with the Relay Race Theory (RRT) proposed by Dyck et al. (2002). RRT compares the succession process to a 4 x 100-meter relay race. From this perspective, the objective of this study was to identify the formal and informal strategies used by Brazilian graduate programs in accounting to prepare for the succession of future coordinators.

The value of this study lies in its discussion of a challenging topic—the succession planning process in graduate programs in accounting, which is essential for sustaining graduate education in the field. Additionally, the timing of this discussion is particularly relevant, as more than 50 years have passed since the creation of the first master's program in accounting at the University of São Paulo (USP). Currently, more than 30 programs offer academic and professional master's and doctoral programs, yet discussions about succession remain incipient, especially in the administrative sphere, even though succession has already become a reality in some institutions.

Hence, this study contributes to the discussion on the role of graduate program coordinators. It provides a clearer understanding of how current leaders can facilitate the task for their successors through an effective transition of leadership, thereby challenging the paradigm that prevails in most cases. Furthermore, recognizing the need to implement succession planning processes contributes to the creation of a talent pool, which supports succession planning and leadership transition strategies, minimizing the negative effects of succession.

## 2 Theoretical Framework

The literature suggests that succession processes should be planned, with the allocation of resources and a continuous commitment to people management identified as preliminary steps. Adhering to well-established criteria regarding the requirements for the role, in accordance with the organizational context and needs, facilitates the identification of potential successors by current managers (Maillard, 2020). The Relay Race Theory (RRT) serves as the analytical lens used to examine this phenomenon.

### 2.1 Relay Race Theory

One way to understand how the succession process works is through an analogy with the RRT (Dyck et al., 2002). The RRT compares the succession process to a 4 x 100-meter relay race, providing a framework for understanding the process that culminates in the passing of the baton between the incumbent and the successor. It serves as a conceptual map for identifying four key organizational factors involved in succession: sequence, timing, baton-passing technique, and communication.

By analogy, the selection of a successor within an organization must consider internal and environmental conditions in order to establish the requirements for identifying the most suitable candidate (Maillard, 2020). Regarding the duration of the handover from the incumbent to the successor, the organizational context is decisive and determines this duration, along with the cooperation of those involved (Hannonen, 2013). Handover techniques are associated with the transition of leadership, relating to the transfer of benefits and drawbacks, as well as the methods used to prepare the successor (Duarte, 2006; Teston et al., 2016; Phillipis, 2021), in addition to preparing the incumbent for departure (Flores & Grisci, 2012; Cain et al., 2018; Macêdo, 2019). Finally, communication between the incumbent and the successor should enable a harmonious and cooperative transition, reflecting the level of trust between them and potentially creating a supportive environment for this process (Hannonen, 2013). Figure 1 illustrates these relationships.

| Factors                 | Relay Race   | Analogy with Succession  |
|-------------------------|--|--|
| Sequence                | Team selection, assessing the athletes' skills and the competitive context | Selecting a successor, considering their competencies and the organizational context |
| Timing                  | Zone where the baton is passed   | Period during which the leadership transition occurs                                 |
| Baton-passing technique | Ways an athlete passes the baton to another                                | Ways of transferring responsibilities and preparing the successor                    |
| Communication           | Notifying the next athlete of the incoming baton                           | Ensuring harmony and cooperation between successor and predecessor                   |

Source: Based on Dyck et al. (2002), Hannonen (2013), UFJF (2016), and Lima (2020).

**Figure 1.** RRT as an analogy for organizational succession

Understanding the RRT requires recognizing succession as a process rather than a one-off event. Effective succession occurs when the baton is passed; however this alone is insufficient to capture its complexity. Succession does not occur only at the moment when the baton is passed but also through the transfer of the entire leadership structure (Lansberg, 1999).

## 2.2 Succession process

Studies on succession date back to the 1960s and initially focused on family businesses. Three main historical approaches are identified: (a) replacement planning, (b) succession planning with an emphasis on development, and (c) succession planning with an emphasis on the organization's strategic needs, the latter being the most desirable (Hall, 1986; Ohtsuki, 2012).

The three approaches describe how thinking about the succession process has evolved over time. Prior studies indicate a shift from a focus on the corrective replacement of an individual to a planned process aimed at ensuring the development of both the institution and the successor, ultimately reaching the stage where succession becomes intrinsic to management—strategically conceived and planned, taking into account the qualities of the successor and the incumbent, as well as the organizational environment and its implications (Hall, 1986; Ohtsuki, 2012).

Succession is seldom explored in academia, with research largely limited to studies in medical fields in the United States focused on the replacement of academic leaders and faculty members approaching retirement (Amburgh et al., 2010; Luna, 2012; Fang & Kesten, 2017; Skarpuski et al., 2018; Baker et al., 2018). Since the study conducted by Amburgh et al. (2010), a turbulent period has been identified for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the pharmacy field in the United States. Due to the scarcity of qualified faculty members available for replacement, flaws in succession planning processes and the absence of a formal structure for their implementation were identified across all 15 institutions examined.

Fang and Kesten (2017) found the number of faculty members over 60 working full-time increased from 17.9% in 2006 to 30.7% in 2015, which indicates a delay in succession processes within educational institutions and an extension of faculty members' professional careers.

Beyond the implications for faculty succession brought about by retirement, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN, 2018, 2019) highlights a reduction in the number of faculty numbers and growing competition between the academia and corporate labor markets, as professionals are often drawn to the corporate sector, which offers more competitive remuneration. In this context, considering the consequences of mass retirement and the shortage of professionals available to replace senior faculty, the absence of structured succession planning processes has generated global concerns, as this gap may affect academia regardless of the country or field of knowledge (Fang & Kesten, 2017; Tucker, 2020).

For graduate programs in Brazil, in particular, concern regarding the shortage of faculty members arises from the limited attractiveness of the academic labor market and the imminent retirement of researchers currently working in the field (Cunha, 2021; Amaral et al., 2022). These factors may compromise master's and doctoral programs in the country if strategic succession planning processes are not implemented to ensure the continuity of graduate education, particularly with regard to leadership in the field and the replacement of faculty members in a context largely shaped by public institutions, which are responsible for offering most accounting graduate programs.

Challenges can be even greater in the context of accounting education. Lima (2021) argues that those working in the field have a strong tendency to value the corporate perspective, which may stem from the difficulties related to entering the academic profession. From this perspective, Gasperi et al. (2020) examined a sample of 36 master's graduates in accounting in Brazil and found that, before obtaining their degrees, only 16.7% were working as educators. However, ten years after completing the program, this proportion increased to 30.6%, indicating a growth of 13.9 percentage points. These numbers highlight the challenges professionals face in entering academic careers, as well as the potential attractions offered by the corporate environment, given that, after graduation, only five additional master's graduates from the study sample became educators. Importantly, due to the low number of PhDs in accounting in the country, a master's degree has become sufficient to teach in some institutions, which can be risky, given that graduate education in accounting often neglects teacher training. Studies show that few graduate programs offer courses related to teacher training (Laffin & Gomes, 2016; Nganga et al., 2022).

Furthermore, Amaral et al. (2022) found that, of the 439 permanent faculty members active in accounting graduate programs in 2020, 78 were projected to reach the age of 60 or older by 2022. When considering a threshold of 55 years or older, this number rises to 147 professors (33%), and when the threshold is reduced to 50 years, the number increases to 233 (53%).

Another concern in this context that negatively affects teacher training is the high dropout rate in graduate programs in the field, a phenomenon identified by Pereira et al. (2021) that may generate negative repercussions for succession processes. Dropout rates in master's and doctoral programs not only represent the loss of students but also imply the loss of potential talent that could contribute to academia and the advancement of knowledge in their respective fields.

Additionally, when faculty members are unable to assume academic and administrative roles in public HEIs, succession becomes even more complex and challenging due to the impossibility of immediate external hiring. Therefore, succession planning becomes essential for the early identification of faculty members interested in these roles, enabling the creation of a talent pool and the preparation of future leaders (Tucker, 2020).

A talent pool becomes an organizational strength, as it retains institutional knowledge, which facilitates a smoother transition of the predecessor's role (Rothwell, 2016). In addition to developing a talent pool, establishing a succession plan that incorporates mentoring is important so that the incumbent can assist in the development of their successor (Tucker, 2020).

Another aspect to consider is that even with a well-established handover process, HEIs may still be surprised by an abrupt departure due to the death or disaffiliation of a faculty member from the institution, further reinforcing the need for a talent pool that can mitigate the effects of such events (Rayburn et al., 2016).

Therefore, as highlighted by Marcon (2008), HEIs need to establish a structured succession planning process that clearly defines the role of each position within the organizational structure. However, this requires the development of a formal succession plan that presents opportunities for career advancement through management positions, making these roles more attractive in the academic sphere rather than a burden for faculty.

For accounting graduate programs in particular, the consequences arising from the lack of succession planning – such as the absence of identifying and preparing a successor coordinator – may compromise the continuity of graduate programs, and consequently, the training of educators in the field (Cunha, 2021).

### 3 Methodological Procedures

This exploratory study adopted a survey strategy (questionnaires and interviews), and the data were analyzed through a predominantly qualitative approach based on template analysis. The population consisted of the coordinators of accounting graduate programs in Brazil.

On the Sucupira Platform (as of June 6, 2022), 38 accounting graduate programs were identified across 16 Brazilian states, with 76% focused exclusively on academic graduate programs and 24% on professional graduate programs.

Given the involvement of human participants, the research protocol was submitted to the Research Ethics Committee at authors' affiliated institution and approved under Certificate of Presentation for Ethical Review (CAAE) No. 55389422.1.0000.5149. After approval of the study and the definition of the target population, the email addresses of the program coordinators were obtained from the Sucupira Platform, the websites of the HEIs and graduate programs, and telephone contact with their administrative offices.

The questionnaire was divided into five sections (Appendix A). The first section included an informed consent form, and the second section contained questions necessary for the identification and characterization of the coordinators. This section ensured that the data used in the study were obtained from coordinators of accounting graduate programs, while also allowing the characterization of respondents in terms of gender, age, and length of service.

The third section, titled "Succession Process," sought to collect participants' perceptions, as well as information on strategies related to succession planning in graduate programs, based on previous literature (Rothwell et al., 2005; Bisbee & Miller, 2006; Amburgh et al., 2010; Luna, 2012; Oltramari, 2015; Rayburn et al., 2016; Siqueira et al., 2016; Rodrigues & Villardi, 2017; Baker et al., 2018; Perlmutter, 2018a, 2018b; Coronetti & Gobbo, 2019; Tucker, 2020; Greco, 2020; Shahin & Suliman, 2022; Arrieta et al., 2022).

The fourth section asked coordinators whether they would be willing to participate in a videoconference interview, and the fifth and final section thanked them for their participation.

A pretest was conducted to ensure an appropriate structure and clear, concise language, thereby avoiding ambiguous interpretation. Issues related to the formulation of some questions were identified and corrected. As no further revisions were required, the instrument was considered validated for application. The interview script was also pretested with two faculty members, and their suggestions were incorporated.

The interviews (Appendix B) were conducted to further understand the succession process within educational institutions and were carried out via videoconference using Zoom. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and was conducted between May 31, 2022 and July 1, 2022.

Semi-structured interviews allowed interviewees to respond freely to the points raised, thereby facilitating the exploration of information through the flexibility this format provides (Michel, 2009). The interviews were conducted using a script based on those employed by Amburgh et al. (2010), Luna (2012), and Tucker (2020), as well as on previous literature (Rothwell et al., 2005; Bisbee & Miller, 2006; Amburgh et al., 2010; Luna, 2012; Oltramari, 2015; Rayburn et al., 2016; Siqueira et al., 2016; Fang & Kesten, 2017; Rodrigues & Villardi, 2017; Baker et al., 2018; Perlmutter, 2018a, 2018b; Coronetti & Gobbo, 2019; Greco, 2020; Tucker, 2020; Arrieta et al., 2022; Shahin & Suliman, 2022).

The interviews were transcribed electronically using the Web Captioner website and subsequently reviewed and corrected by the researcher who conducted the interviews. This process involved revising the transcripts to include portions of speech that were not captured by the software or were captured with errors.

## 4 Presentation and Analysis of Results

Nineteen questionnaires with valid responses were received, representing 50% of the graduate programs existing at the time of the study and 56% of the HEIs offering master's and/or doctoral degrees in accounting.

The participants comprised 16 men (84%) and 3 women (16%). This finding suggests the existence of barriers to women's participation into the academic environment and/or to women occupying coordination positions, an issue previously highlighted by Siqueira et al. (2016).

Participants had an average age of 48 years and an average of 19 years of teaching experience. These professionals were affiliated with 14 public institutions, four private institutions, and one community institution. The participants' educational institutions offered six master's and doctoral programs, two professional master's and doctoral programs, and 11 master's-only programs (of which four are professional).

### 4.1 Descriptive analysis of questionnaire data

Analysis of the responses obtained from the questionnaire indicates that 11 respondents (58%) were from programs with established rules governing the succession of coordinators. However, the examples provided suggest that these rules largely correspond to those established in each institution's election process, such as the predefined term of office and eligibility requirements for holding the position. The data corroborate these expectations, as the studies by Amburgh et al. (2010) and Luna (2012) also identified the absence of formal documents addressing the succession process in academia as a whole in most of the institutions examined by these authors.

When asked about their perceptions of interest in the coordinator position, only 6 participants (32%) reported perceiving some level of interest among faculty members in assuming the role. This finding corroborates the studies by Bisbee and Miller (2006), Baker et al. (2018), and Perlmutter (2018a, 2018b), which indicate that the coordinator role is often perceived as burdensome and undesirable. This is particularly evident in public HEIs, where even the financial incentive is not considered advantageous. However, it is important to note that, with the exception of one participant, all respondents reported that their faculty includes members capable of assuming the coordination role.

Regarding the identification of successors, the data suggest that little effort is made in this direction and, in some cases, no effort at all, with only informal conversations among faculty members. Baker et al. (2018) and Perlmutter (2018a, 2018b) found similar evidence and point to the lack of preparation and identification of faculty for the role as one of the reasons for the low willingness to assume the coordinator role.

The main obstacles faced by program management include a lack of support from faculty, the accumulation of responsibilities, and veiled sabotage by some colleagues resulting from disagreements within program teams. Luna (2012) notes that the likelihood of a successful succession process increases with support and communication between the successor and faculty. Problems related to the accumulation of responsibilities were also evidenced by Baker et al. (2018) and Perlmutter (2018a, 2018b), who report that excessive workload is accompanied by increased responsibility and stress associated with coordination activities.

The responses show a positive aspect: strong interaction between former and current coordinators, including mentoring and collaborative partnerships. This practice aligns with what is desired in a succession process, in which previous coordinators should be willing to support their successors. In this context, Maillard (2020) identifies mentoring and preparation as fundamental steps for successful succession. Amburgh et al. (2010) also consider mentoring one of the ways in which the predecessor can support the development of the successor.

The questionnaires indicated that nine participants (47%) coordinated programs with some established succession process, all from public HEIs. These coordinators were invited via email to participate in the interviews. Invitations were sent on four occasions between May 19, 2022 and June 20, 2022. Following this process, six coordinators agreed to participate.

## 4.2 Qualitative analysis of the interviews

This section presents the qualitative analysis of the interviews. Information regarding the interview dates, duration, and the total number of pages resulting from their transcriptions is presented in Figure 2.

| Participant | Date          | Duration | Number of pages |
|-------------|---------------|----------|-----------------|
| P4          | May 31, 2022  | 1h28min  | 16              |
| P5          | June 1, 2022  | 51min    | 10              |
| P9          | June 6, 2022  | 1h10min  | 11              |
| P15         | June 17, 2022 | 60min    | 10              |
| P17         | July 1, 2022  | 1h34min  | 16              |
| P19         | June 9, 2022  | 1h02min  | 12              |

Source: Study data.

**Figure 2.** Interviews and Transcriptions

Of the six interview respondents, four were men and two were women. The average age of the participants was 47 years, and the average teaching experience was 20 years. All were affiliated with public institutions.

The transcripts of the interviews were sent to the respective participants for approval to ensure that they faithfully represented what the participants wished to convey through their accounts.

The interviews were analyzed using template analysis of the interview data. For its implementation, hierarchical coding in the form of templates was required. Templates present, in a condensed form, the themes identified within two hierarchical categories. The first-order categories (Higher Order Codes) represents a broad theme encompassing all segmentations of the second-order categories (Lower Order Codes), which consist of more specific themes (King, 2004). The first-order categories were defined based on the factors present in the RRT that underlies this study, whereas the second-order categories were initially based on the interview script.

To arrive at the final delimitation of the second-order categories, the responses were tabulated using Microsoft Excel. The transcripts were then read, and fragments relevant to the study's objectives were highlighted. This process enabled better alignment of the second-order categories through the creation of new categories and the merging of existing ones, which were subsequently renamed. Figure 3 presents the first- and second-order categories used in the analysis and relates them to the factors of the RRT.



| RRT Factor              | First-order category                 | Second-order category                  |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| Sequence                | Being a coordinator                  | Why I became a coordinator             |
|                         |                                      | Benefits and drawbacks of coordination |
|                         | Identification of successor          | Interest in the role                   |
|                         |                                      | Barriers and difficulties              |
| Timing                  | People management                    | Selection of the successor             |
|                         |                                      | Talent pool                            |
|                         |                                      | Preparation of faculty members         |
| Baton-passing technique | Transfer of the leadership structure | Emergency plan                         |
|                         |                                      | Support for planned departures         |
| Communication           | Communication                        | Cooperation of the current coordinator |
|                         |                                      | Cooperation among faculty members      |
|                         |                                      | Contact during the baton handover      |

Source: Study data.

**Figure 3.** Relationship between template analysis categories and RRT factors

The coordinators' statements helped to identify their perceptions of succession planning and the importance of its implementation for the graduate program. Additionally, these statements contributed to understanding whether and how the topic has been discussed within HEIs.

### 4.3 Perceptions and the state of the discussion on academic succession planning

Initially, the study sought to identify participants' perceptions of succession planning and the current state of the discussion within graduate programs. The accounts indicate that the concept of succession planning is consistent with the literature. However, interviewees expressed concerns regarding the need for formal implementation, as they believe it could have negative consequences and lead to excessive rigidity in the process. They also argued that the perceived lack of interest in assuming the role is still incipient, which may result in a shortage of eligible members willing to assume the position.

Accounts from participants P15 and P17 indicate that formal recognition of the succession process is not a consensus within the program, as management tends to focus primarily on the requirements established by the regulatory body (CAPES).

...“CAPES doesn't require it, nobody requires it, so it's really something that depends on the program's management, right? It will still take some time for us to develop a culture that encourages discussion of this issue” [P15]

...“and the whole CAPES issue... You just do what CAPES tells you to do... And I feel that strongly here, you know? There's a culture of simply doing what CAPES requires.” [P17]

The issue of succession remains incipient in most of the graduate programs studied, with accounts highlighting the need to raise awareness among faculty members regarding the importance of succession planning for the continuity of master's and doctoral programs in the field. The findings also suggest a preference for maintaining or creating informal succession arrangements, due to concerns that a formal process could hinder the transfer of leadership and restrict candidacies for positions that are sometimes uncontested. This perception aligns with the study by Shahin and Suliman (2022), which found that faculty tend to assume management roles only when a more structured succession plan is in place.

The absence of a well-structured process may be the main factor limiting candidates' willingness to apply for the coordinator position. In this context, the lack of formal transition training or other supporting mechanisms may lead faculty members to assume the role without adequate preparation, which can generate demotivation. At the same time, informal arrangements may also have positive aspects, as they can help avoid excessive rigidity in the selection process until a more structured process is formally established.

## 4.4 Analysis of the succession process through the lens of the RRT.

### 4.4.1 Sequence

Within an organization, it is crucial to consider not only internal demands but also the characteristics of the external environment in which it operates. Such analysis allows the organization to establish the requirements necessary to identify and select the most appropriate successor for a given position. As noted by Maillard (2020), understanding both the organization's internal needs and external influences is fundamental to ensuring that the chosen successor is capable of addressing challenges and taking advantage of opportunities within the context in which the organization operates. This stage of the succession process is referred to as the sequence.

The first point of analysis, "being a coordinator," explored the reasons that led the interviewees to the coordination role. Coordinators P4, P9, and P19 reported that it was not their intention to assume the position; however, they did so due to a lack of alternatives within the department and, in order to avoid harming the program, accepted the role. P9 and P19 also stated that they did not feel prepared for such a role, as they were newcomers to their respective graduate programs. The other interviewees reported a genuine interest in the position. Subsequently, the coordinators were asked about what they perceived as the benefits and drawbacks of having assumed the role. Table 1 presents the findings from this stage of the interviews.

Table 1  
**Benefits and drawbacks of serving as program coordinator**

| Drawbacks                                   | Proportion (%) | Benefits                 | Proportion (%) |
|---|----------------|--------------------------|----------------|
| Excessive workload                          | 100            | Recognition              | 67             |
| Responsibilities                            | 33             | Professional development | 50             |
| Dealing with administrative staff           | 33             | Job satisfaction         | 50             |
| Being associated with the role of "villain" | 33             | Greater control          | 17             |
| Bureaucracy                                 | 33             | Financial compensation   | 17             |
| Lack of clarity in CAPES criteria           | 17             | Power                    | 17             |

Source: Study data.

At this stage of the interview, three negative themes regarding the experience of leading the coordination were identified. P9 stated that serving as coordinator requires demanding more from colleagues, which may lead to being perceived as the "villain." As a result, there is concern that when the coordination changes, retaliation from the next coordinator may occur. Greco (2020) also identified interpersonal relationships as a source of difficulty for 50% of the interviewees, highlighting situations in which disagreements about a proposal are interpreted as personal attacks rather than professional disagreements. The following excerpt illustrates the perception of interviewee P9 mentioned above.

[...] I was the coordinator and I “kept pushing him”, and for good reason, right? Then suddenly, when I’m back in a regular faculty position, he might start pushing me simply as retaliation. [P9]

P19’s account addresses the consequences of excessive workload and the shortcomings of the program’s secretariat. Similar accounts were also identified in the study conducted by Oltramari (2015), which highlighted the negative effects of the excessive accumulation of coordination responsibilities. This included some reports of regret about having assumed the coordination role. A similar perception is illustrated in the excerpt from the interview with P19.

[...] this has cost me time, it has cost me even my health, it has cost me time with my family and friends, and even publications [...] so, at the same time that today, after a year in charge of the coordination, I think I am a better coordinator than I was a year ago, I think I am a worse teacher. [...] I am a worse researcher, a worse father, a worse husband; so, I think these are drawbacks that came with this coordination and the circumstances under which I assumed it. [P19]

The third theme emerged from the statements of P4 and P9, both women, who reported the presence of sexist attitudes during their tenures. They indicated that they often felt the need to prove their competence at every meeting, including situations in which support from a male colleague was necessary for their proposals to be approved.

[...] until the former coordinator finally spoke up and said, “No, you’re mistaken, because it works like this, like this, and like this.” What happened? The person accepted it. I’m sure that if I had continued trying to explain, he would have continued insisting that he was right and I was wrong. [P4]

The issue of being a woman. At times, I felt that because I was a woman in a leadership position, I faced some resistance. [P9]

Structural bias in educational institutions is a phenomenon documented in the literature. The concept of the so-called glass ceiling has highlighted, across various sectors, the difficulties women face in attaining management positions (Franceschette, 2019). The results reported by Siqueira et al. (2016) reinforce the challenges women encounter in attaining leadership positions and reveal a discrepancy between the proportions of women and men occupying these roles.

The second point analyzed, “identification of the successor,” proved to be a complex task, particularly considering the coordinators’ perception of a lack of interest among faculty members in assuming the role. Only the graduate programs of P4, P5, and P15 have previously established, albeit informal, methods for identifying successors. In the graduate programs in which P4 and P15 are involved, the vice-coordinator usually assumes the position in the following term, and in P5’s program there is a rotation of research lines, with prior discussion to define those nominated for management positions. In the graduate programs of the other interviewees, there are only internal regulations, with the successor being identified only after a candidacy for the position is expressed. If no one volunteers, the faculty meets informally and encourages a member considered suitable for the role to apply.

To a large extent, the accounts provided by the interviewees regarding the sequence are corroborated by the study conducted by Arrieta et al. (2022), which identified the absence of a succession plan as the main cause of the low interest in leadership roles. Without such a plan, the criteria for assuming the coordination role become unclear, and the lack of training contributes to insufficient preparation, which also affects faculty members’ willingness to assume the position. This issue is evident in the accounts of P4 and P9.

[...] only me and one other person were left; those were the only options available to run for the position. And then [...] two professors came and said, “If so-and-so becomes coordinator, I’m leaving.” So, I didn’t have much of a choice—I accepted. I couldn’t allow the program to risk its continuity. [P4]

Some vote because the person is a friend or a partner, mixing personal and professional matters: “I don’t vote for so-and-so because I don’t like him.” So, I think the criterion isn’t ability; it’s other factors. [P9]

The fact that some graduate programs designate the future coordinator and vice-coordinator through informal conversations suggests that technical and interpersonal skills are not always the sole criteria considered for the role.

#### 4.4.2 Timing

According to RRT, timing reflects the period from the identification and election of the successor to the completion of the transfer of the entire leadership structure. Within this factor, “people management” is the main element related to the duration of the leadership transition, because effective management facilitates the identification of successors, the planning of procedures for unexpected departures, and the management of planned departures. One mechanism that can support this process is the creation of a talent pool; such a mechanism does not exist in the interviewees’ graduate programs though.

The interviews indicate that there are capable individuals who are uninterested in the position. An exception was found in P5’s program, which, despite not having a talent pool, showed interest among faculty members, or at least acceptance of the idea of assuming a management role, since there is a consensus that everyone in the program will, at some point, serve as coordinator.

So the research lines themselves indicate the coordinator and the vice-coordinator... and it is through this practice that we manage these successions. There is a kind of common sense in indicating the professor who will take part in the coordination or vice-coordination. Once the name is chosen by the research lines, it goes forward as a candidate in the election, and normally the process occurs without problems. The vote is almost unanimous, because it is already understood that each research line has chosen the best person for that moment. [P5]

Therefore, the study sought to understand how the program assists in preparing faculty members to assume the coordinator role. P4 reported that one way the institution prepares coordinators is by offering pedagogical and administrative courses, which are not specific to the program but are offered broadly within the institution. P5 described that preparation occurs through participation in the collegiate body, which provides some experience related to coordination. P9 and P19 stated that the institution does not provide any type of support for preparing future coordinators. P15 noted that the fact that the vice-coordinator assumes the position in the following administration was sufficient for their preparation. In P17’s program, the strategy used to minimize the information gap was the mixing of more and less experienced faculty members in committees, and a lecture delivered by representatives from CAPES was also reported. A consensus among the interviewees is that unless such preparation is required or offered as a course by the institution or CAPES, it is unlikely to be widely accepted.

The lack of opportunities to prepare coordinators for the role is not limited to the graduate programs addressed in this study. The study conducted by Rodrigues and Villardi (2017) also highlighted the absence of training to prepare individuals to assume the role, which makes the coordinator’s learning path arduous and results in professionals who are unprepared and unsupported in their management roles.

Regarding unplanned departures of coordinators, all interviewees stated that the only provision described in the internal regulations is that the vice-coordinator assumes the role; otherwise, a new election is held. Only P17 reported having witnessed an unplanned departure. When this occurred, there was a collective effort to identify qualified faculty members to assume the position.

Regarding planned departures, there is a consensus that when an individual expresses interest in leaving the program, they are no longer considered for management positions. There are also no support measures for coordinators at the end of their terms. Only P15 reported the presence of “more active” former coordinators, but noted that this does not hinder their management, as they listen to their ideas, consider their usefulness, and ultimately make their own decisions. P4’s account is noteworthy, as it reveals deeper feelings about managing the program and draws an analogy between the program and a child.

But on the day I handed over the coordination, when I went to say goodbye in the faculty group and in the committee group, and then left the committee group and saw the message “You left the group” (referring to WhatsApp), I cried, because it’s like a child. It’s a child that I carried and cared for until it was six years old. So we become attached to it, and we want it to succeed and continue succeeding—for the child to be well and just keep growing. [P4]

Dyck et al. (2002) explain that timing is influenced by internal and external factors, which may either increase or decrease the duration of the transition. These authors also describe how the handover can be slower when the environment is not highly competitive or when the organization is mature. They further emphasize that overlapping terms between the incumbent and successor can facilitate the transition in these contexts.

#### 4.4.3 Baton-passing technique

The baton-passing technique refers to the way the power structure is transferred to the successor. In her account, P4 reinforces the informal practice of the vice-coordinator assuming the coordination in the following term. However, the participant stated that this alone was insufficient for her preparation, since she was not included in all processes when she held the position of vice-coordinator. P15 considered that this practice was sufficient for her to be able to continue the activities as coordinator, with only a few doubts remaining. P5 describes that, in the period preceding the assumption of the new coordinator, all decisions that may affect the following term are made jointly, and there is a moment when a list of items that may impact operational procedures is shared.

P9, P17, and P19 reported that there was no transition period. P9 reported having to repeatedly ask the secretary and their predecessor about certain tasks and deadlines due to the absence of a proper transition. P19, similarly to P9, reported a lack of proactivity from their predecessor, received little support during the transition, and had to consult with their predecessor regarding certain procedures.

[...] I had little support there, in the sense that everything needed to be requested; I had to encounter the problem first and then go looking for answers. There was no proactivity in this transition; in terms of guidance, training, and explaining the procedures, there was none. [P19]

Meanwhile, P17 noted that the transition process was not a problem, as he already had experience in management and his vice-coordinator is his predecessor. Therefore, cooperation between the two resolved this issue.

The problem of the absence of a formal transition process is not unique to this study. In research conducted by Oltramari (2015), an interviewee reported that she unexpectedly assumed the position without a transition process, implying that there was negligence in the transition during the succession.

#### 4.4.4 Communication

Communication highlights the cooperation between the predecessor and the successor. Since the graduate programs studied generally have several former coordinators, cooperation was observed both from the immediate predecessor and from the faculty as a whole toward the new coordinator. This cooperation between the former coordinator and the successor is mainly characterized by sporadic support when it occurs. There is no structured transition period to integrate and prepare the successor for the responsibilities of the position. Communication therefore appears to be limited to occasional consultations after the handover.

P4 reported that communication was not effective during or after the transition, as it was hindered by the unavailability of the predecessor, and stated that the greatest support during the management period came from the vice-coordinator. P9 presented a similar account, reporting the need to seek knowledge independently in order to perform certain tasks. This communication gap was observed even with the vice-coordinator, as illustrated in the following excerpt.

To give you an idea, last year when I was coordinator, I took maternity leave and left a to-do list: you need to do this, this, and this. When I returned from my leave, I didn't receive the same consideration. [P9]

P5 describes communication as very effective in their graduate program, since even before the end of the term, the successor is already included in decision-making, with the support of other faculty members. Similarly, P15 notes that communication occurred through the support received in completing the Sucupira Platform report, including the provision of tips and explanations about how internal processes work, as well as the participation of faculty during committee meetings.

P17 highlights that communication was minimal during the transition. However, since the vice-coordinator is his immediate predecessor, communication between them remains efficient throughout his term, and other faculty members also respond to his requests for assistance. In contrast, in the case of P19, in addition to the lack of communication during the transition, there was little support when issues arose. Communication failures were also identified by Shahin and Suliman (2022) as one of the main obstacles to the implementation of a succession plan.

Figure 4 summarizes the reservations identified in relation to some of the succession strategies, as reported by the interviewees.

| Strategy   | Participant |      |      |      |      |      |
|--|-------------|------|------|------|------|------|
|  | P4          | P5   | P9   | P15  | P17  | P19  |
| Prior identification of a successor                      | YES         | YES  | NO   | YES  | NO   | NO   |
| Talent pool  | YES*        | YES  | YES* | YES* | YES* | YES* |
| Coordinator preparation                                  | YES         | YES* | NO   | YES* | YES* | NO   |
| Emergency plan   | YES         | YES  | YES  | YES  | YES  | YES  |
| Support for departures                                   | NO          | NO   | NO   | NO   | NO   | NO   |
| Cooperation of the current coordinator                   | YES*        | YES  | NO*  | YES  | YES* | YES* |
| Cooperation among faculty members                        | YES         | YES  | NO   | YES  | YES  | YES  |
| Communication between outgoing and incoming coordinators | NO          | YES  | NO   | YES  | YES  | YES  |

Legend: \*strategy present but with reservations reported by participants

Source: Study data.

**Figure 4.** Succession strategies

The respondents unanimously expressed positive views regarding the talent pool, whereas assistance with departures was viewed negatively by all participants.

## 5 Final Considerations

This study aimed to identify the formal and informal strategies used by Brazilian graduate programs in accounting to prepare for the succession of their coordinators. To achieve this objective, questionnaires were administered and interviews were conducted with coordinators of the programs included in the study. The findings provide relevant evidence for professors, researchers, and educational policymakers interested in graduate education, particularly those involved in the field of accounting, as they highlight existing weaknesses in the succession process within programs in this area.

One of the main findings is the presence of a talent pool composed largely of former coordinators, while interest in assuming the coordination role among other faculty members is rare. Consequently, although capable professionals were identified, in most cases there is little motivation to assume the position.

Regarding the preparation of coordinators, in the few graduate programs where some form of training was identified, preparation tended to occur through indirect mechanisms such as mentoring while serving as vice-coordinator and participation in lectures or mandatory activities, including membership in collegiate bodies and committees. Only one program reported having a structured succession process, represented by the offering of pedagogical and administrative courses by the HEI, although these courses had a generic scope.

Limited cooperation was reported when coordinators assumed the role, although most participants indicated a willingness to change this stance to support their successors, with only rare exceptions. This finding suggests some changes in faculty members' attitudes and highlights the absence of retaliatory behavior, even with the absence of proactive transition practices.

Furthermore, two graduate programs reported having some type of practice that contributes to the succession process. With regard to succession practices, it was observed that graduate programs that do not establish measures for the prior identification of successors tend to adopt a replacement plan. This approach is based on corrective actions, in which concerns about selecting successors arise only when the term of office ends or is close to ending. This pattern highlights delays and a lack of proactive discussions within programs regarding the succession of their coordinators.

In graduate programs where informal practices for selecting successors were identified—either by predefining that the current vice-coordinator will become the next coordinator or by nomination—the approach can be characterized as succession planning with an emphasis on development. This approach allows for the preparation of the successor, facilitating a smoother transition and greater efficiency in the new management. As a result, the incoming coordinator can continue the work of the predecessor from where it was left off, being fully or partially familiar with the procedures previously adopted.

However, none of the programs have well-established and widely accepted succession measures or strategies. Virtually all face the problem of limited interest in the role, and even the practices identified in relation to some succession strategies lack consistency. These results indicate that, overall, the succession of coordinators in the analyzed accounting graduate programs remains at an early stage of development.

This reveals a significant challenge for graduate programs related to the availability of faculty members willing to voluntarily assume the role of coordinator and its associated responsibilities. Accounts from those who assumed the position unwillingly emphasized their lack of experience, with insufficient preparation among faculty for coordination acting as a deterrent, as well as limited or no cooperation from their immediate predecessor or other faculty members.

It is clear that one of the reasons for the difficulty in finding volunteers for the coordination role may be linked to the negative experiences associate with performing the role without adequate preparation and support.

Therefore, outlining measures that can make the role more attractive and ensure that the benefits identified by participants outweigh the drawbacks can help stimulate interest among new faculty members in the role. With greater interest, it becomes possible to identify potential successors in advance, which would justify the creation of formal training for those willing to assume the position and ultimately lead to the formation of a genuine talent pool.

However, dissociating the coordinator role from negative perceptions is not a simple task. This study is expected to contribute to discussions about the role of the coordinator in graduate programs by highlighting how current leaders can make the task less burdensome for their successors through an effective transition of the leadership responsibilities and by challenging the prevailing paradigm observed in many programs. It is also hoped that HEIs will recognize the need to establish succession plans as a fundamental element for the development of graduate programs, ensuring continuity with each change in leadership rather than repeated institutional restarts, and minimizing delays and losses in management efficiency that may compromise program sustainability.

Note that the results of this study have limitations related to the experiences reported by the interviewees, as well as the need for participants to recall past events that may not have been fully remembered. Another limitation of this study concerns the low participation rate of the target population, which consisted of professors from accounting graduate programs at public institutions. Given the differences in the procedures adopted by the analyzed programs—particularly the absence of consensus regarding succession planning practices—it is not possible to generalize the identified practices to other institutions, and they should therefore be considered specific to the HEIs analyzed in this study.

Furthermore, this study focused on identifying the direct and/or indirect strategies used by Brazilian graduate programs in accounting to prepare for the succession of their coordinators. For future research, it is suggested that the scope be expanded to include private institutions in order to incorporate other members of the faculty and to support the development of succession plans for coordinators and the broader faculty of accounting graduate programs.

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## APPENDIX A – QUESTIONNAIRE

### FIRST PART: RESPONDENTS' IDENTIFICATION

Full name:

Please inform your age in years:

Gender:

Male

Female

Non-binary / other

Prefer not to say

Years of experience in academia:

Are you currently the coordinator of the program?

### SECOND PART: SUCCESSION PROCESS

Does the graduate program have established rules regarding the succession of the coordinator (for example, a pre-established term of office or alternation between research lines)?

Yes

No

2) If your previous answer was yes, please specify which rules:

3) Do you perceive interest among faculty members in assuming the coordination role?

Yes

No

4) If you answered yes, please describe behaviors that demonstrate such interest.

- 5) Does the program have faculty members prepared to immediately assume the coordination role?  
( ) Yes  
( ) No
- 6) If you answered no, how would the program handle the coordinator's unexpected departure?
- 7) What consistent efforts does the program make to identify potential candidates to assume the coordinator position?
- 8) What obstacles might a leader encounter in relation to their academic responsibilities (teaching, research, and outreach) within the program?
- 9) Is it possible to identify cooperation between senior faculty and those at early and mid-career stages as a form of mentoring or preparation for leadership positions?  
( ) Yes  
( ) No
- 10) If you answered yes, through what actions?

### **THIRD PART: INVITATION FOR THE INTERVIEW**

Would you agree to participate in an online interview to be scheduled at a later date?

- ( ) Yes  
( ) No

If you agree to participate in the interview, please leave the email address where you would like to be contacted.

### **APPENDIX B – INTERVIEW SCRIPT**

- 1) In your perception, academic succession planning consists of...
- 2) Does the program have established succession measures for coordinators and faculty members?
- 3) Do you believe that implementing an academic succession plan for coordinators is necessary?
- 4) What is the importance of an established succession plan for a successful educational program?
- 5) Historically, how has the program dealt with changes in coordinators?
- 6) Does the program have measures to address situations where there is an abrupt departure of the coordinator?
- 7) Does the program have a talent pool of potential coordinators?

- 8) In your opinion, do the individuals in the talent pool with the potential to fill the coordinator position possess the appropriate skills and knowledge should a vacancy arise abruptly?
- 9) When an abrupt departure of a coordinator occurs, what is the process for replacement? Has such a situation ever happened?
- 10) Does the program have measures to assist with planned departures, especially those related to retirement?
- 11) Do you believe the program is prepared to replace faculty members who may retire within the next five years using the department's talent pool?
- 12) How does the program prepare potential leaders for the coordinator role through leadership skills assessment, education, or career development?
- 13) In your opinion, are the measures mentioned in the previous question sufficient to prepare faculty members to assume the coordination role immediately and in the long term?
- 14) What criteria did you consider to apply for/decide to assume the position of coordinator at the institution?
- 15) What are the benefits and drawbacks of the coordinator position?
- 16) Are you aware of the requirements to serve as a coordinator according to the program?
- 17) What are the main barriers that a potential leader may encounter within the program?
- 18) Do you perceive cooperation between senior faculty and those in the early and mid-career stages as a form of mentoring or preparation?
- 19) Do you perceive cooperation between faculty members with coordination experience and those in the early and mid-career stages as a form of mentoring or preparation?
- 20) Do you perceive interest from the program's faculty members in assuming the coordination role?
- 21) If you would like to add any detail that you believe is relevant to the research, please feel free to do so.