


“Who Guards the Guards?”: A Study About the Power of Bank Managers Concerning the Organizational Electronic Control

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ABSTRACT

The studies about panopticism have a highlighted spot on organizational researches. Recently, with the inclusion of information technology, it creates the digital panopticon, in which informational systems perform the control, including on the vigilantes themselves (managers). Thus, this study addresses hierarchy, power, and the insertion of information technology in banking organizations to understand the perception of managers about their power over the team on this new kind of materialization of power. For such, this qualitative exploratory research used interview and observation as data collection and triangulation techniques. The treatment of information performed was by speech analysis. The analysis of collected data revealed that the manager is not responsible for the conception of work anymore, because they became a task performer, showing their subjection to the system of the establishment and target control; after all, the power is in the system.

KEYWORDS

Banks, Digital Panopticon, Managers, Power

1. INTRODUCTION

The control over employees brings up the discussion about power, because their work routines have surveillance and disciplining elements widely discussed since the Classic Administrative Theory. Given this concern scenario, with disciplinary and time control and by the alterations on the forms of power, Foucault (1975) makes a review of the panoptic concept. The panopticon is an architectural prison project (Bentham 2008), in circular form, in which detainees are permanently monitored, while the guards see without being seen. (Foucault 1975) In contemporary times, however, an analysis of control demonstration needs to consider the technological revolution. The digital era, which concentrates most of the technological advances, led to the creation of control mechanisms increasingly sophisticated.

This constant evolution of technology made possible the creation of the virtual panopticon concept, digital panoptic or electronic surveillance. The different names used by the available literature can be considered similar, and in this study, they will be represented by digital panoptic. Pereira, Segre and Nascimento (2013), Correio (2010), Clarke (1988), Chevitaresh and Pedro (2005) and Elmer

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(2003) are used as the basis for the digital panoptic concept, and it “can be considered as an analogy of the surveillance mechanisms mediated by technological devices”. (Correio, 2010: 187). Much more than the replacement of the inspector (individual) by the machine (computer system), the idea of electronic surveillance goes beyond visual control and reaches the work routine through a system that records all of the employee’s acts; sending activity and performed act reports; that dictates the work flow; and directs efforts through establishment and control of goals.

The impacts of information technology (IT) on organizational configuration, especially on human capital, are noteworthy. The introduction of new digital devices such as software and control systems and data processing by banks has significantly affected the performance of managers. Managing position was always provided with an aura (status) of power, motivated by the autonomy that these employees always had and by the possibility of making decisions that could affect their subordinates. However, with the emergence, development and proliferation of information technologies it is possible to question if there is a loss of autonomy by these managers.

In this research, we chose to study the Brazilian banking sector. Throughout the XX century, this sector has gone through some deep transformation, mainly related to the insertion of technology on work and control methodology. In Brazilian society, the bank sector has been shown as the forefront in the processes, signalling the changes that will be noticed on other organizations over the time. The increased use of IT, the strategic positioning of IT professionals and the digitization of end-user service contributed to these changes (Bacen 2015). Under this perspective, the following question is suitable: What is the perception of Brazilian branch bank managers about their power regarding the team? Seeking to answer the proposed research problem, the general goal of this research is set: Understanding what is the perception of Brazilian branch bank managers about their power regarding the team, in relation to the operation of the digital panopticon.

As a justification for this study, its practical, theoretical and social relevance can be listed. The practical relevance lies in establishing a link between the use of new technologies and the performance of managers, offering suggestions for managing human capital not only from financial institutions, but from all organizations began to use IT strategically. In theory, this research is justified by the study of a contemporary phenomenon, from a recognized theoretical basis. Thus, it mentions the reach of banking services network (more than 20 thousand agencies) and the number of employees (more than 468 thousand employees in Brazil). (Bacen 2015; Dieese 2015). The vanguard that the banking sector has is also notable. Innovations, both in technology applied to companies and in management models, are studied and applied by banks, generally prior to its use in other areas. Therefore, studying the banking sector and its relation with employees can be shown as an indication of the future of companies from other areas and the direction that society will manifest too.

It is also possible to observe that research shows advances in studies related to banking work. It can be mentioned Singh et al. (2020) that proposes an IT-Governance framework for the Indian Banking Industry; and Valek (2016) that addresses possible directions which time banking research is taking: project management, knowledge management, retention of users and sustainability of economy related to time banking, necessity for further research in the field, necessity of professionalization of time banks and creation of international support network for cooperation in the field, because in time banking there is no competition.

Studies related to work surveillance and control are a theme studied and discussed over time. However, the insertion of technology in these control mechanisms is still poorly studied, and due to its dynamic nature, it needs constant studies that can collaborate with the related theory. Regarding the productions related to digital control in Brazilian’s banks, Grisci et al. (2011), Weber and Grisci (2011), Cardoso (2010), Bessi (2009), Zimmer (2009), Bessi et al. (2007) have shown the impact of digital technologies on the reorganization of work and on the banker’s physical and mental health, since Brazil was one of the countries where the implementation of digital technologies happened quickly and widely. On the other hand, the available studies do not problematize issues related to the reorganization of managers’ power in this new environment. Likewise, it becomes relevant to

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