

# We are IntechOpen, the world's leading publisher of Open Access books Built by scientists, for scientists

6,900

Open access books available

186,000

International authors and editors

200M

Downloads

Our authors are among the

154

Countries delivered to

TOP 1%

most cited scientists

12.2%

Contributors from top 500 universities



WEB OF SCIENCE™

Selection of our books indexed in the Book Citation Index  
in Web of Science™ Core Collection (BKCI)

Interested in publishing with us?  
Contact [book.department@intechopen.com](mailto:book.department@intechopen.com)

Numbers displayed above are based on latest data collected.  
For more information visit [www.intechopen.com](http://www.intechopen.com)



---

# Human Work and its Discontents

---

Anderson de Souza Sant'Anna,  
Zélia Miranda Kilimnik and Daniela Martins Diniz

Additional information is available at the end of the chapter

<http://dx.doi.org/10.5772/67611>

---

## Abstract

The objective of the proposed chapter is to discuss the evolution of research on meanings and quality of life at work, highlighting gaps and emphasizing the way the approach that articulates “work” and “human suffering” can contribute to advance in contemporary studies in this field [1]. Given its centrality in people's life and in society development, work has been analyzed from different perspectives and methodological-theoretical-conceptual approaches [2–5]. Notwithstanding the plurality of views on the theme, it is generally possible to define it as an activity that has an objective and is aimed at producing some personal or collective result that is objectively and/or subjectively useful. It can also be carried out within the space of employment, employment being understood as the set of remunerated activities performed within a system that is economically organized and marked by institutionalized exchange relations.

**Keywords:** human work, human suffering, psychopathology of work

---

## 1. Introduction

In this chapter, the authors seek to gather a set of views from colleagues, as well as excerpts from articles they have produced on themes concerning contemporary individual-work-organizations-society relations [6–9]. Such preparations and academic productions were mainly incited by the centrality of work in people's lives and in the development of society, in addition to the plethora of focuses and theoretical-methodological approaches adopted in the pursuit of their study and experience [1, 2, 4, 5, 10, 11]. In the plurality of views about the theme notwithstanding, it can be generally defined as an objective-seeking activity veered toward yielding some result, personal or collective, containing an objective and/or subjective usefulness. It can also be executed within the confines of employment, understood as the set of gainful activities performed in an economically organized system, market by institutionalized exchange relations.

However, attributing the strict meaning of employment to work may entail negative implications, both at the personal and institutional levels. Above all, work is an activity through which individuals are inserted into the world, exercise their talents, define themselves and create value, and provide them with feelings of personal accomplishments in return. Therefore, work is also a means to manage the anguish of emptiness.

Kilimnik [12] purports that work contains a historic-philosophic importance, to the extent that it is through work that man changes nature and himself and, by doing it, creates culture, science, language and the society where he lives. It also contains scientific relevance given the great interest that theme has aroused as concerns the development of research efforts in myriad areas of knowledge [13]. Its economic relevance is equally undisputable, to the extent that work is the main means by which human beings obtain the financial resources for their livelihood [14]. Also notable is work's sociological importance: after all, in today's society, the work context has a greater social needs satisfaction potential than family, neighborhood or social clubs. In the same vein, its psychological significance is appreciable, since work positions the individual in society, making a contribution towards the construction of his identity and personality [15].

These aspects notwithstanding, only recently—for the past two decades—have the importance of work in the preservation of people's physical and mental health been recognized more broadly and systemically. Even more recent is the recognition, by managers of the impacts that work has upon health, especially as concerns its psychic dimension. Therefore, this current concern with the meanings of work or quality of work life seems to be closely related to, among other factors, the importance that work has been taking in the psychic dimension of individuals [16].

Nevertheless, the theories developed so far about work and quality of life and also about the meanings of work have been under much criticism [17]. First, some studies have been criticized for excluding important variables from their analyses, which affect the characteristics of the endeavor. Second, many models have not given due attention to the extent to which job satisfaction can be determined by relatively stable worker personality variables. Third, a major part of the models have given scant emphasis to the examination of possible environmental determinants in job satisfaction. Finally, there is a scarcity of studies that seek to analyze human work through the perspective of suffering.

Concerning the last gap mentioned above, Chanlat [1] posits that the psychopathology of work offers consistent contributions to the understanding of the articulation between work and suffering, since this field of study places suffering in the center of the psychic relationship between man and work. The author defines suffering as the struggling space that covers the field between well-being, on one side, and mental disease or madness, on the other. It can be classified as singular suffering—that inherited from each individual's own psychic history (diachronic dimension) and current suffering, emerging in work situations (synchronic dimension). To minimize suffering, the individual proceeds to construct original solutions simultaneously favorable to work and health (creative suffering). On the other hand, unfavorable solutions are called “pathogenic suffering” by this author [1].

In his study, Chanlat [1] posits that work pressures that jeopardize psychic balance entail from the organization of work (division of tasks), contrarily to embarrassment caused by work's

physical and biological conditions, for which the body is the main target. The author also argues that it is a mistake to try and eliminate suffering from work, as previous studies suggest. First, because once driven away, suffering reappears and crystallizes in other forms offered by reality. Second, because pleasure at work derives from suffering. Therefore, in the organizational context, it behooves the manager to provide conditions in which workers may manage their suffering themselves, to the benefit of their health and, consequently, to the benefit of productivity. The challenge would then be reconciling mental health and work.

Consequently, the classic work motivation rationale—ensuing from Maslow's hierarchy of needs—is now challenged to the extent that the motivation notion is replaced by the discomfort and suffering dynamics concept. Therefore, the perspectives around discomfort and human suffering in organizations, as reiterated by the psychopathology of work, can make relevant contributions to the contemporary debate about human work and are personal, organizational and societal implications.

In this context, the objective of this proposed chapter is to discuss the evolution of research on meanings and quality of work life, highlighting gaps and emphasizing in what way the approach articulating “work” and “human suffering” can contribute toward advancing studies into this area [1]. Beyond this introduction, the first chapter approaches the origin, the concepts and dimensions of quality of working life—QWL. Later, studies are discussed that introduce the notion of the meanings of work. In the sequence, the perspective that articulates “work” and “human suffering” is presented. The present chapter ends with final considerations and suggestions for future studies.

## **2. Quality of working life: origin, evolution, concepts and dimensions**

### **2.1. Origins and evolution**

The theme “quality of working life” is not an exclusive concern of today's researchers. Since the beginnings of civilization, man has sought manners to make his struggle for survival milder. History and paleontology, for example, provide myriad evidence that individuals, since time immemorial, have sought to develop artifacts, tools and methods to minimize wear and tear from work and/or make it more pleasurable.

However, the scientific study of work conditions and their influence upon production and worker morale began with the industrial revolution and the systematization of production methods in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Albeit through an eminently economic perspective, the first theorizations into issues concerning worker satisfaction and productivity can be found in the works of the “liberal school”. Smith, in his “The Wealth of Nations,” highlighted the influence of compensation upon worker satisfaction and, consequently, upon productivity improvement.

Upon the advent of scientific management, the study of human work found new dimensions. Work became thoroughly studied, seeking at extracting the best result from the workers' efforts. Taylor, sharing with Smith the belief that a supposed harmony of interests between employers and employees, stated that employee prosperity was associated with employer

prosperity and thus (and still through eminently economic-rational lenses) the importance of considering the worker satisfaction issue. However, by promoting an excessive fragmentation of work and turning the human being into a simple cog in the production system gears, Taylorism methods entailed a series of explicit discontent reactions, the increase of absenteeism and the number of sabotage, strike movements and myriad conflicts.

At this time, the Hawthorne (US) experiments, coordinated by Elton Mayo, and the Tavistock Institute (UK), under the direction of Eric Trist, brought great contributions to the study of human behavior in organizations by signaling, for the first time, the importance of psychological and social factors [18]. Mayo's studies, for example, signaled that human work yield is influenced not only by aspects of the physical-chemical environment but also by the particular characteristics of each individual and by the relationships such individual establishes with the group wherein he or she belongs.

Besides the works of Mayo and Trist, the studies developed by Maslow (the human motivation pyramid) and Herzberg (the Motivation-Hygiene Theory) are noteworthy. Maslow [19] developed the human needs pyramid composed of five levels: (1) physiological needs, (2) safety needs, (3) social needs, (4) self-esteem needs and (5) self-actualization needs. According to the author, for individuals to be interested in higher level needs, their lower level needs must be satisfied. Thus, only when needs related to physiological aspects (e.g., food and water needs) are under control will individuals be concerned with safety and shelter. Upon meeting these needs, people would feel the need for interpersonal relationships. Next, they would require personal esteem, recognition and prestige, and finally, they would be motivated by the need to reach their full potential as human beings [19].

Herzberg [20] in turn suggested that motivation is composed by two dimensions (unrelated): work aspects that may hinder satisfaction but do not impact employees in their growth and development (hygiene factors) and work-related aspects that effectively encourage such development (motivation factors). The first category—hygiene factors—comprises aspects extrinsic to the task, that is, aspects related to the conditions under which the same are performed, such as the company's administration policy, supervision, interpersonal relations, work conditions, compensation and job security. These factors do not entail an increase of job satisfaction, but their absence can cause dissatisfaction. The second category of needs—motivational factors—comprises, in turn, those aspects responsible for satisfaction in itself and contains the following dimensions: freedom to create and innovate, actualization, recognition, responsibility, and the possibility of growth and development [20].

These studies, therefore, drove the consolidation of the “human relations school”, where the quality of working life will find great identification for the emphasis given to the worker's psychosocial and motivational aspects. Thus, during the 1950s and 1960s, the behavioral approach was recognized as the true origin of QWL [21].

Thenceforth, QWL field work saw a quick growth, and the early 1970s was marked by important initiatives in the sense of adapting the new knowledge of the behavioral science to



organizations. Nadler and Lawler [22], upon conducting an analysis of the movement around QWL, concluded that, initially treated as an individual reaction to work and then as a link in cooperative work projects, QWL evolved and became understood as a means for work environment enrichment and to achieve greater productivity and satisfaction [22].

Currently, the apologia for workaholics, established personae in the 1980s, had been strongly repealed, and concern with quality of life has prompted a growing number of researchers to explore the global conditions where work is performed in an attempt to rescue the humanization of the organizational environment. Today's QWL emphasis resides upon the replacement of a deskbound lifestyle and stress by an increased balance between work and leisure that entails a better quality of life [23].

This current concern with the quality of life at work seems to be closely related, among other factors, to the importance that work has assumed in the psychic plane of individuals. Today's organizations may perhaps be the main venue for man to acquire his identity and seek his ideal ego.

Once completed this contextualization about QWL origins, the following section expounds the main concepts and dimensions related to this theme.

## 2.2. Concepts and main dimensions

QWL has been defined in literature by different forms. However, most concepts share a QWL understanding as being a reaction movement against Taylorism and, consequently, as an instrument whose objective is to provide for greater work humanization, increased employee well-being and their greater participation in organizational decisions. Along this line, QWL has been construed as a concrete application of a humanist philosophy, seeking to change aspects of and in work, in order to create a more favorable situation for employee satisfaction vis-à-vis the increase of organizational productivity.

Huse and Cummings [24, p. 79] understand the quality of working life as a “manner of thinking” involving people, work and the organization, highlighting two distinctive points: (a) a concern with employee well-being and organizational efficiency and (b) employee participation in decisions and work issues”. Walto [25] posits that QWL describes certain environmental and human values neglected by industrial societies in favor of technological, industrial productivity and economic growth advances. Davis [26] also submits a generic QWL concept, indicating that it can be construed as the favorable or unfavorable conditions of a work environment for employees.

Guest [27, p. 76] is a little more specific and defines the quality of working life as follows:

*[...] a process by which an organization tries to unveil its personnel's creative potential, involving them in decisions that affect them in their work. A marked characteristic of the process is that its objectives are not simply extrinsic, focusing upon productivity and efficiency improvements; they are also intrinsic as concerns what employees see as self-actualization and self-aggrandizing purposes. [27]*

Fernandes [28] presents a more systemic QWL concept and argues that it is supported by four pillars: (1) problem-solving involving organization members at all levels (participation, suggestions), (2) restructuring work's basic nature (job enrichment, job redesign, job rotation), (3) innovation in the reward system (financial and non-financial rewards) and (4) improving the work environment (ambiance, culture, physical environment and ergonomic aspects).

Beyond concepts, literature on QWL harbors different theoretical models discussing dimensions and factors impacting the quality of working life. Because of their theoretical relevance, the models by the following persons were approached, following a chronological order: (1) Walto [25]; (2) Belanger et al. [29]; (3) Hackman and Oldham [30]; (4) Lippit [31]; and (5) Huse and Cummings [24].

In 1973, Walto proposed a model to evaluate the quality of working life based on eight criteria, which comprise the diagnostic of aspects such as fair and adequate compensation, safety and health in working conditions, the immediate opportunity to develop human capabilities and social integration in the organization, among other factors listed in **Table 1**.

In the same year, Belanger et al. [29] discussed the role of four dimensions of quality of working life, presented in **Table 2**.

Factors	Dimensions
1. Fair and adequate compensation	1.1. Income adequate to work 1.2. Internal equity 1.3. External equity
2. Safety and health in working conditions	2.1. Working hours 2.2. Safe and healthy physical environment
3. Immediate opportunity to develop human capabilities	3.1. Autonomy 3.2. Task meaning 3.3. Task identity 3.4. Variety of skills 3.5. Feedback
4. Future opportunity for continuous growth and professional assurance	4.1. Career possibilities 4.2. Professional growth 4.3. Job security
5. Social integration in the organization	5.1. Equal opportunities 5.2. Relationship 5.3. Community sense
6. Constitutionalism	6.1. Respect for laws and workers' rights 6.2. Personal privacy 6.3. Freedom of expression 6.4. Norms and routines
7. Work and total life space	7.1. Balanced work role
8. The social relevance of work	8.1. Corporate image 8.2. Social responsibility for services 8.3. Social responsibility for employees

**Table 1.** QWL dimensions, adapted from Ref. [25].

Dimensions	Variables
1. Work in itself	Creativity, variability, autonomy, involvement feedback
2. Personal and professional growth	Training, growth opportunities, relationships at work, organizational roles
3. Meaningful tasks	Complete tasks, enhanced responsibility, financial/non-financial rewards, enrichment
4. Open functions and structures	Climate and creativity, transfer of objectives

**Table 2.** QWL dimensions, adapted from Ref. [29].

Two years later, Hackman and Oldham [30] upheld the idea that job characteristics promote the emergence of three critical psychological states capable of determining an individual's job satisfaction. The first of these critical psychological states is defined as the perceived significance, or the degree to which a person perceives his job as being important, valuable and significant within his value scale. The second refers to responsibility as perceived by the worker vis-à-vis his work, that is, the extent to which the individual feels responsible for the results of the work he or she performs. The third critical psychological state concerns the employee's understanding of the work done, that is, the extent to which the individual knows and understands his or her effective task performance.

The task dimensions present in their model and whose presence creates these critical psychological states are [30] as follows:

1. **Skill variety (SH):** The extent to which a task requires myriad different activities to be performed, through the involvement and use of different skills and talents by the same individual.
2. **Task identity (TI):** The extent to which the task requires the performance of full work, that is, work done from beginning to end aiming at obtaining visible results.
3. **Task significance (TS):** The extent to which the task bears a substantial impact upon the life or work of other people, be they organization members or outsiders.
4. **Autonomy (AU):** The extent to which the task provides the individual with substantial independence and freedom to schedule his work and determines the procedures for its execution.
5. **Extrinsic feedback (EF):** The extent to which the individual is given clear information about his performance, from his superiors, colleagues or customers.
6. **Knowledge of outcomes (KO):** The extent to which the performance of work activities provides direct, clear information about the worker's performance.
7. **Interrelationship (IR):** The extent to which work requires employees to deal directly with other persons, customers included.

In the sequence, Lippit's model [31] resumes the eight QWL criteria proposed by Walton [25] and organizes them into four key factors, as shown below (**Table 3**).



Factors	Dimensions
1. Work in itself	Performance feedback Clear work objectives Reduced controls Greater responsibility Individual involvement in the decision-making process
2. The individual	Improving self-image Learning possibilities Climate favorable to friendship Coherence between life and work objectives
3. The yield of work	Increased responsibilities Intergroup collaboration Full and unit work Rewards for quality/innovation Measurable objectives
4. Organizational jobs and structure	Climate favorable to creativity Adequate communication (two-way) Respect for the individual Feeling of advancement and organizational development

**Table 3.** QWL dimensions, adapted from Ref. [31].

For Lippit [31], this model is veered toward meeting both the individuals’ and the organization’s needs.

In 1985, Huse and Cummings [24] called attention to the fact that QWL involves the people-work-organization trinomial. In this sense, for these authors, the implementation of quality of work life should take the following factors into account (**Table 4**).

Despite the relationship between QWL and productivity, the assumption that the by Quality of Work Life improving satisfaction and thence increasing productivity has proven quite simplistic and often mistaken. For the authors, QWL technology may, indirectly, improve productivity by having a positive impact upon organizational communication, employee motivation and worker capacity building. In a nutshell, Huse and Cummings [24, p. 204] conclude that:

Factors	Description
1. Worker participation	The operationalization of worker participation can happen via their involvement in quality control circles (QCC), works councils, cooperative groups or upon other channels to allow them to participate in decision-making processes
2. Job design	Job designs should be adjusted to workers’ needs and technological requirements. Job enrichment should be sought, taking into account the aspects such as the variety of skills, feedback and establishment of self-managed work groups
3. Innovation of the reward system	This factor concerns the review of the entire organization job & wages plan aiming at seeking a better balance among the different wage levels and functional status
4. Improvement of the organizational environment	Involves the provision of conditions such as flexible working hours, changes of workplaces or work equipments and the establishment of semi-autonomous work groups

**Table 4.** QWL dimensions, adapted from Ref. [24].

*In summary QWL interventions may have a direct effect upon productivity by improving communication and coordination, employee motivation and individual capacity-building. They may also directly influence productivity via the secondary effects of worker well-being and satisfaction improvements.*

For the purpose of advancing along the construct “quality of work life”, some studies have sought to investigate the “meanings of work,” such as the research work developed by the *Centre de Recherche et d’Intervention pour le Travail, l’Efficacité Organisationnelle et la Santé—Criteos*, under the coordination of Professor Estelle M. Morin. We will delve deeper into this and other studies in the following section [7, 9].

The word “senses” has two origins. From Latin *sensus*, it means the faculty of perception and also meaning, import and interpretation. It also means the idea or image that represents a signal, an experience. Its German root, *sinnan*, means to go, travel, strive after, have in mind and perceive. In psychology, the senses especially refer to the experience of coherence, equilibrium and fullness. Thus, senses comprise three components:

1. **Meaning** (*Sensus*): the meaning of work, its value in the eyes of the individual and its definition or representation.
2. **Orientation** (*Sinnan*): the direction of the individual at work, what the person seeks and the purposes that guide his actions.
3. **Coherence** (Phenomenology): the result of the consistence between the person and the work he performs, and between his expectations and values and what this person demonstrates daily at work.

Besides considering these components, the sense that individuals attribute to work is influenced by their perception of the environment in which it is developed. That is, work makes sense for people when they perceive an alignment with their identity, their work and the context in which it is done.

As a theoretical-methodological approach, the perspective of work senses is linked to the conception of existentialist psychiatrists. People need to find sense in their activities, lest they plummet into *existential frustration* [32]. Modern existentialism thinkers, be they philosophers, psychologists and/or artists, are concerned with the concrete experiences of human existing when discussing the senses issue in organizations [33], among the focuses of studies centered on work senses, the research efforts mentioned in **Table 5** are notable [34].

The characteristics of meaningful work were the specific object of several research endeavors since the 1960s. By way of consequence, a new field of knowledge, called job design, came into being [35–37].

The meaning of work is perceived as a state of satisfaction caused by the perception of coherence between the person and the work the person performed [38]. This author defined eight characteristics that contribute toward providing sense to work: (1) identification with the work and the environment wherein it is performed, (2) good relations with others, (3) a feeling

Main authors	Analytical variables
Mow [13]	Work adds value to something Work is central to people's lives Work is an activity that benefits others Work is not pleasant Work is physically and mentally demanding Work is a regular, gainful activity
Emery [35, 36] Trist [37]	Work shows varieties and is challenging Work brings continuous learning Work allows autonomy and decision-making Work is recognized Work brings social contribution Work can be used as defense against anguish
Hackman and Oldham [30]	Work should provide, besides context features: - Variety of skills - Task identity - Task meaning - Interrelationship - Autonomy - Intrinsic feedback - Extrinsic feedback
Morin [16, 39, 40]	Work is efficient and yields a useful result There is pleasure in doing the task Work affords autonomy Work is a source of satisfactory human relations Work keeps people busy Work is morally acceptable

**Table 5.** Research into the meaning of work, adapted from Ref. [34].

of usefulness and contribution toward an important project, (4) a feeling of importance and benefit for the next person, (5) learning and pleasure in performing work, (6) participation in the improvement of process effectiveness and working conditions, (7) a feeling of autonomy in the performance of work and (8) a feeling of responsibility and pride for the work done [38].

Under the influence of this study, since the 1990s, Morin [39, 40] has conducted investigations in different environments to determine the characteristics of meaningful work. This author identified five essential characteristics, to wit:

1. **The usefulness of work:** doing something that is useful to others or to society or that makes a contribution to society;
2. **Moral righteousness:** performing morally justifiable work;
3. **Learning and development:** performing work that corresponds to competences, which affords learning, developing one's potential and reaching objectives;
4. **Autonomy:** exercising competences and judgment to solve problems and make work-related decisions;
5. **Quality of relations:** performing work that allows interesting contacts, good relations with colleagues and influence the environment [39, 40].

In the context of Brazilian research into the meanings of work, the empirical study conducted by Morin, Tonelli and Pliopas [34] is noteworthy. This study sought to investigate the senses that young managers attribute to work. The most recurrent themes from the research were compiled in **Table 6**.

From the data gathered by Morin et al. [34], similarities become noticeable between the themes approached in Brazil and in international research endeavors concerning the meanings of work; in Brazil, however, a greater number of themes germane to the individual dimension rather than the organizational and societal themes were unveiled. Another important aspect is the investigation of the sense that men and women derive from work, suggesting that the gender dimension may be of the essence in themes such as identity, independence and personal satisfaction, for example. The respondents' age is another fundamental factor that that research findings indicate as differentiating.

Dimension	Variable	Work is meaningful when...	
Individual dimension	Personal satisfaction	Whoever performs the work feels pleasure and likes what he does	
		It is a challenge to be overcome	
		The person perceives his contribution as unique and creative	
	Independence and survival	It rewards whoever does it financially	
		Allows the individual to achieve a better quality of living	
		Provides the feeling of financial and psychological independence	
	Growth and learning	Professional growth/learning	
	Identity	Provides an identity to those who work	
		The company where the person works is recognized	
		It is a status symbol	
Organizational dimension		Usefulness	Whoever does it understands the process from beginning to end
	It is useful to the organization		
	Relationship	A person has the opportunity of relating to others	
		Someone in the organization provides recognition	
	Social dimension	Social insertion	Affords social insertion
		Social contribution	Contributes to society
			It is considered ethical and morally acceptable

**Table 6.** Characteristics of meaningful work, adapted from Ref. [34].

Another study, conducted by Carvalho et al. [9], investigated the sense that “new” and “veteran” employees at an oil company manifest in relation to work, for the purpose of identifying differences and similarities between these two groups of professionals. Analysis of the findings suggests, for veteran employees, work whose “sense” is more identified with humanistic values and greater “commitment” with the company. For newer employees, the creation of sense at work is veered toward concern with professional development.

Some studies associate the meanings of work with workers’ health. Isaksen [38], for example, observed that people who provide sense to work support stress better. This research indicates that meaningful work entails preventive effects upon people’s health. Work suffering factors are clearly described by studies about stress at work: work load and pace; schedules (rotating, variable, unpredictable, night time, long); the future of employment (job security); recognition and support; and autonomy and exercise of skills. When inadequate, these factors may create health problems, affecting people’s working capabilities. Therefore, they represent the target for disease and psychological suffering prevention in the work environment.

Nelson and Simmons [41] pinpoint five sets of stress factors: job requirements, relation requirements, psychic requirements, organizational policies and working conditions. Since the stress phenomenon is complex, these factors may create, at the same time, *eustress* (positive stress) and suffering (negative stress). Consequences of the individual are mediated by individual differences (behaviors’ type A and type B), such as the person’s optimistic nature, his feeling of personal effectiveness, his style of attribution (*Locus of Control*) self-reliance and his feeling of coherence. The ensuing psychological status carries effects upon health, performance and private life, with better results appearing when the person feels pleasure with his work. In the case of suffering, people mobilize their defense systems to offset distress, in order to maintain, after all, performance at work and quality of life.

The sense that individuals provide to work and to the relations established with it also depends on individual factors or differences, such as sex, personality type, emotional traits and style of attributions. Consequently, it is also necessary to control these factors to better understand the relations among work, health and individual and organizational performance indicators [41].

Despite their relevance in studies concerning well-being and human work, research into “the meanings of work” delves shallow into the articulation between work and suffering, a perspective to be discussed in the following section.

### 3. Work and human suffering

The objective of this section is to discuss the articulations between work and human suffering. There are currently more systematic and deeper studies in this area because of the emergence of a field of studies called “Work Psychopathology,” which positions suffering at the center of the psychic relation between man and work [1].

The first research pursuits in the 1950s were dedicated to the investigation of psychic disturbances caused by work. Unquestionably, this is the reason why studies relating to



stress theory emerged at the same time. An important issue that beaoned investigations into the psychopathology of work was as follows: How can employees, despite the embarrassments found in the work situation, preserve their psychic equilibrium and maintain normalcy? Thus, the focus was less into the investigation of mental illnesses and more into the strategies crafted by employees to deal with suffering and mentally cope with the work situation [1].

Therefore, the “psychopathology of work” emphasis resides in suffering management, defined as follows:

*(...) the struggle space covering the field found between, on the one hand, “well-being” (resuming the expression established by the WHO definition of health) and, on the other side mental illness or madness. [1, p. 153]*

As far as origin is concerned, suffering can be classified as singular suffering (diachronic dimension)—that inherited from each individual's own psychic history and current suffering (synchronic dimension), emerging from the relationship that the individual establishes in work situations. Considering the responses (strategies) that workers devise to cope with working situations, suffering can be creative or pathogenic. The first occurs when the subject, struggling against suffering, crafts original solutions, which are generally simultaneously favorable to production and health. On the other hand, the individual may propose unfavorable solutions to his own health as well, creating pathogenic suffering [1].

As of the early 1980s, the psychopathology of work was especially concerned with the establishment of a clinic for this suffering found in the psychic relation with work. Studies disclosed that pressures from work that jeopardize equilibrium and mental health do not ensue from physical conditions (noise, temperature, vibrations, etc.), nor chemical (dust, vapors, etc.) or biological (viruses, bacteria, fungi), whose main target is the body; they are caused, above all, by the division of tasks (the organization of work), which affects the worker's mind [1].

Another issue highlighted by the psychopathology of work is that there is no deriving satisfaction from work *abseunt* suffering, since “(...) pleasure from work is a product *derived* from suffering” [1, p. 160]. Eliminating suffering from work situations is a mistake, as noted in the text below:

*Concerned with workers' health or with company's effectiveness, many specialists would like to orientate actions towards making suffering disappear. This objective is vain, if not absurd. Firstly because as soon as driven away, suffering reappears and crystallizes in other forms as offered by reality. [1, p. 160]*

Therefore, instead of suppressing situations that cause suffering, managers should provide conditions under which individuals can themselves manage their anguish. The challenge is then to reconcile mental health and work.

In convergence with this line, psychoanalysis itself recognizes that there is no way to eliminate the symptom, which has two aspects: suffering and dysfunction [42]:

*For psychoanalysis, there is no symptom elimination but a transmutation of symptoms. When one disappears, the other steps in, in greater or lesser tune with the subject. In this sense, it is true that psychoanalysis does not heal. [42, p. 31]*

Thus, psychoanalysis proposes to reconcile the subject with the symptom, treating *by* the symptom instead of treating *the* symptom, implying a change in the relationship between the individual and his enjoyment (his fantasy). According to Barreto [42], the “dream” of suffering disappearance is associated with the capitalist discourse:

*Well-being is the dream of the capitalist discourse, and scientific discourse contributes to reinforce that intent: the end of unnecessary human suffering and a hitherto inexperienced level of happiness. Well-being ethics is something so present that it impregnates trade and industry, arts and sports, the media and political projects. Being happy, more than an individual pursuit, is part of government plans. [42, p.38]*

Therefore, a field like psychoanalysis—which understands each individual as being different than the next, each treatment distinct from the next, which does not advocate the elimination of symptoms as a satisfactory solution and considers happiness to be a hard-to-solve problem—definitely clashes against the ideals of globalization.

Indeed, throughout his elaborations on social phenomena, Fred continuously highlighted the importance of cultural material available and active in society for the psychic operation of subjectivities. Following such indication, much has been discussed in the psychoanalytic *milieu* about the dynamics of contemporary society, seeking to make explicit the extent to which the cultural context favors the production of subjectivation modes distinct from those emerging in the beginnings of the twentieth century.

The theoretical framework of psychoanalysis is based on Freud's clinic, with hysterics. Since *The Interpretation of Dreams* [43], however, the world underwent significant changes and current modes of psychic suffering are not the same that characterize the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Scientific and technological advances, the globalization of the economy and markets and the new outlines of the capitalist production and consumption system arouse issues and impasse different than those that characterized the time when psychoanalysis was conceived.

Ensuing from the ensemble of changes that highlight contemporary management systems of subject-work-organization relations, notably, and among other aspects, is the fact that the worker experiences the insecurity of obtaining a job opportunity and sufficient gains for his own maintenance and is prompted to self-manage himself as owner of his own career. Issues related to fidelity and trust are therefore frontally affected, especially in countries such as Brazil where emotional relationships, camaraderie and informality are strongly connected to protectionism and employment and authority ties [44].

If there is a relationship between the subject and one's subjective experience, then one could say that there equally is a relationship between types of illness and the appearance of new manners of subjectivation. One could also expand these assumptions proposing new issues,

such as Why does a specific manner of suffering impose itself at specific times? To what extent are the modes of illness disclosers of individuality changes in specific periods?

From such framework, one could consider the contemporary subjectivation experience articulates with specific forms of illness, while the subjective experience of modernity articulated or had others prevail. If this is the case, What about psychoanalysis and its extent in the organizational context?

Thus, What about the changes experiences in the work environment? What has been cast regarding the production of new subjectivities? As concerns the effects of new management models upon workers, domestic bibliography in the management field has suggested an absence of consensus and radical critics to more optimistic authors regarding the possibilities of these new models that can be identified. Underlining trends that seem to be quickly disseminating among more innovative companies, among which are labor training and stabilization policies, leaner wages and jobs structures and delayering companies, more optimistic authors have remarked that these policies have been implying significant changes in workplaces, including the abatement of the conflictive nature that was characteristic of labor relations in the country from their very beginnings [45].

Studies also exist that convey to the analysis of the implications ensuing from new organizational setups about *subjectivity* and mental health of workers, indicating the emergence of new forms of suffering and occupational illnesses [1, 2, 5, 46–48].

From the illnesses whose focus was the body, in its physical dimension—muscular fatigue, back pain, injuries and illnesses ensuing from physical conditions at the workplace—typical of the *industrial era*, the counterpoise are new symptoms and illnesses which now have the *psy* dimension as their primary target: anxiety, depression, stress, burnout syndromes and a broad array of new maladies.

From the analysis of this ensemble of authors, verifiably, at the same time that organizational innovations can signify the possibility of more enriched, autonomous and creative work for some, they may also represent poorer work, devoid of content and more precarious for others, and even their simple exclusion from the formal work market. In a work, they bring along new challenges, paradoxes and contradictions whose effects upon workers and especially upon their mental health and modes of subjectivation deserve better understanding.

The human suffering perspective in organizations, therefore, could bring original contributions to the debate about the relationship between individuals and work.

#### 4. Final remarks

As indicated elsewhere, we reiterate that in the face of the scenario outlined above, the need for new manners of grasping the organizational phenomenon becomes evident, concentrating greater attention upon the potential of the psychoanalytic framework into reflections, notably as concerns aspects such as (1) addressing discomfort in the context of work and

contemporary organizations; (2) the new form of control introjection in the context of these organizations and their implications upon the workers' psychic dimension; (3) new organizational arrangements vis-à-vis the polemic, however, instigating, notion of *declining paternal function*; (4) the new modalities of emerging social ties within the scope of today's organizations, branded by virtuality and new technologies, which significantly change time, distance and space notions; (5) the subjective implications of the discontinuance of the traditional psychological contract between employer and employee, resting upon the safety-fidelity binomial, to emphasize the freedom-result dyad; (6) the *perverse setups* in the current organizational environment; (7) the ambiguities, contradictions and diasporas typical of a risk society; and (8) the emergence of new symptoms and pathology stemming from the current work context [6].

In summary, resorting once more to Sant'Anna (2011), the author highlights the relevance of longer *conversations* [49] between management and other fields of knowledge, among which psychoanalysis shows significant potential to be deeply explored as concerns *new perspectives* and theoretical-methodological-conceptual approaches capable of providing more comprehensive views of the multiple facets that characterize the complexity of subject-work-organization relations in contemporaneity [1, 50, 51].

## Author details

Anderson de Souza Sant'Anna<sup>1</sup>, Zélia Miranda Kilimnik<sup>2</sup> and Daniela Martins Diniz<sup>1\*</sup>

\*Address all correspondence to: danidiniz09@yahoo.com.br

1 Fundação Dom Cabral—FDC, Nova Lima, Brazil

2 Universidade FUMEC, Belo Horizonte, Brazil

## References

- [1] Chanlat J F. O Indivíduo na organização: dimensões esquecidas. 1ª ed. São Paulo: Atlas; 1996. 300 p.
- [2] Antunes R. Adeus ao trabalho? Ensaio sobre as metamorfoses e a centralidade do mundo do trabalho. 1ª ed. São Paulo: Cortez/Unicamp; 1995. 288 p.
- [3] Antunes R. Os sentidos do trabalho: ensaios sobre a afirmação e a negação do trabalho. 1ª ed. São Paulo: Boitempo; 1999. 264 p.
- [4] Bauman Z. O mal-estar da pós-modernidade. 1ª ed. Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar; 1998. 276 p.
- [5] Sennett R. A corrosão do caráter: consequências pessoais do trabalho no novo capitalismo. 1ª ed. Rio de Janeiro: Record; 1999. 204 p.

- [6] Sant'Anna A S. Psychoanalysis and contemporary subject-work-organizations relations. *International Forum of Psychoanalysis*. 2011, 21(1), 35–40. doi:10.1080/0803706X.2011.605799
- [7] Morin E, Sant'Anna A S, Carvalho R A, Fonseca S T D. Os sentidos do trabalho: implicações pessoais e organizacionais. In: Sant'Anna A S, Kilimnik Z M. *Qualidade de vida no trabalho: abordagens e fundamentos*. 1 ed. Rio de Janeiro: Campus-Elsevier, 2011. pp. 278–295.
- [8] Sant'Anna A S, Kilimnik Z M, Moraes L F R. Antecedentes, origens e evolução do movimento em torno da qualidade de vida no trabalho. In: Sant'Anna A S, Kilimnik Z M. *Qualidade de vida no trabalho: abordagens e fundamentos*. 1 ed. Rio de Janeiro: Campus-Elsevier, 2011. pp. 3–30.
- [9] Carvalho R A A, Fonseca S T D, Sant'Anna A S. A produção de sentido no trabalho: um estudo sobre a percepção dos trabalhadores em uma empresa petrolífera. Relatório de pesquisa. Nova Lima: Fundação Dom Cabral, 2009.
- [10] Beck U. O que é globalização? Equívocos do globalismo: respostas à globalização. 1ª ed. São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 1999. 282 p.
- [11] Rifkin J. O fim dos empregos: o declínio inevitável dos níveis dos empregos e a redução da força global de trabalho. 1ª ed. São Paulo: Makron Books, 1995. 348 p.
- [12] Kilimnik Z M. Trajetórias e transições de carreiras profissionais de recursos humanos [tese]. Belo Horizonte: CEPEAD/UFMG, 2000.
- [13] Mow. International Research Team: The meaning of work. New York: Academic Press, 1978.
- [14] Powers P, Russell D. De bem com o trabalho: como fazer o que você gosta ou gostar do que você faz. São Paulo: Best Selle, 1993.
- [15] Lévy-Leboyer C. A crise das motivações. São Paulo: Atlas, 1994.
- [16] Morin E. Os sentidos do trabalho. In: Wood T, editor. *Gestão empresarial: o fator humano*. 1ª ed. São Paulo: Atlas, 2002. pp. 57–68.
- [17] Micholson N, Brown C A, Chadwich-Jones J K. Absence from work and job satisfaction. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 1976, 61(6): 728–35. doi:10.1037/0021-9010.61.6.728
- [18] Schein E. *Psicologia organizacional*. Rio de Janeiro: Prentice-Hall; 1982. 260 p.
- [19] Maslow A H. Uma teoria da motivação humana. In: Yolanda F, Cordeiro L L, editors. *O comportamento humano na empresa*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora FGV, 1977. pp. 102–115.
- [20] Herzberg F. *Work and the nature of man*. Cleveland: World Publishing Co.; 1966. 203 p.
- [21] Moraes L F R, Kilimnik Z M. Comprometimento organizacional, qualidade de vida e stress no trabalho: uma abordagem de diagnóstico comparativo [tese]. Belo Horizonte: UFMG; 1994.
- [22] Nadler D, Hackman J R, Lawler E. *Comportamento organizacional*. Rio de Janeiro: Campus; 1983. 268 p.



- [23] Kilimnik Z M, Moraes L F R, Ramos W M. O atual estado da arte da qualidade de vida no trabalho no Brasil. In: EnANPAD. Proceedings... Curitiba: ANPAD, 1994. pp. 305–325.
- [24] Huse E, Cummings T. Organization development and change. St. Paul: West Publishing; 1985. 832 p.
- [25] Walto, R. Quality of working life: What is it? Sloan Management Review, 1973, 15(1): 11–21.
- [26] Davis L. Job design and productivity: a new approach. Personnel, 1957, 33(1): 418–430.
- [27] Guest, R. H. Quality of work life: learning from Torrytown. Harvard Business Review; 1979. pp. 76–87.
- [28] Fernandes E C. Qualidade de vida no trabalho: como medir para melhorar. Salvador: Casa da Qualidade; 1996. 128 p.
- [29] Belanger L, Bergeron J L, Petit A. Gestion des Ressources Humaines: une approche global et intégrée. Quebec: Gaëtan Morin, 1973.
- [30] Hackman J R, Oldham G R, Development of the job diagnostic survey. Journal of Applied Psychology, 1975, 60(2): 159–170.
- [31] Lippit G I. Quality of work life: organization renewal in action. Training and Development Journal, 1978, 32(1): 4–10.
- [32] Frankl V. O sentido da vida. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 1984. 160 p.
- [33] Pauchant T C. La quête de l'excellence et le déni de la mort. In: T C Pauchant, editors. La quête du sens: gérer nos organisations pour la santé des personnes, de nos sociétés et de la nature. Québec: Éditions de l'organisation, 1996. pp. 139–162.
- [34] Morin E, Tonelli M J, Pliopas A L V. O trabalho e seus sentidos. Psicologia & Sociedade, 2003, 19(1): 47–56. doi:10.1590/S0102-71822007000400008
- [35] Emery F. Report on the Hunsfoss project. London: Tavistock; 1964. 160 p.
- [36] Emery F. Future we are in Leiden. London: Martinus Nijhoff; 1976. 180 p.
- [37] Trist E. Adapting to a changing world. Labour Gazette, 1978, 78(1): 14–20.
- [38] Isaksen J. Constructing meaning despite the drudgery of repetitive work. Journal of Humanistic Psychology, 2000, 40(3): 84–107.
- [39] Morin E. L'efficacité organisationnelle et le sens du travail. In: Pauchant T C, editors. La quête du sens: gérer nos organisations pour la santé des personnes, de nos sociétés et de la nature. Québec: Éditions de l'organisation, 1996. pp. 257–286.
- [40] Morin E. Le sens du travail pour des gestionnaires francophones. Revue Psychologie du Travail et des Organisations, 1997, 3(2): 26–45.
- [41] Nelson D L, Simmons B L. Health psychology and work stress: A more positive approach. In: Quick J C, Tetrick L E, editors. Handbook of occupational health psychology. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2003. pp. 97–119.

- [42] Barreto F P. O bem-estar na civilização. Curitiba: CRV, 2015. 248 p.
- [43] Freud S. L'interpretation des rêves. Paris: PUF; 1976.
- [44] Oliveira C A. O mundo do trabalho. São Paulo: Página Aberta; 1994.
- [45] Leite E. Trabalho e qualificação: a classe operária vai à escola. In: I Reunião do GT Cambio Tecnológico, Calificación y Capacitación da Red Latinoamericana de Educación y Trabajo. Proceedings... São Paulo: Unicamp, 1993.
- [46] Dejours C. A loucura no trabalho: estudos em psicopatologia do trabalho. São Paulo: Cortez; 1987.
- [47] Codo W. Um diagnóstico integrado do trabalho com ênfase em saúde mental. In: Jacques M G, Codo, W, editors. Saúde Mental e trabalho: leituras. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2002.
- [48] Davel E, Vergara S. Gestão com Pessoas e Subjetividade. Editora Atlas. São Paulo; 2001. 320 p.
- [49] Clegg S R, Hardy C. Introdução: organização e estudos organizacionais. In: Clegg S R, Hardy C, Nord W R, editors. Handbook de estudos organizacionais: modelos de análise e novas questões em estudos orgnizacionais. São Paulo: Atlas, 1999.
- [50] Enriquez E. A organização em análise. Petrópolis: Vozes; 1997. 302 p.
- [51] Lapierre L. Imaginário e liderança. São Paulo: Atlas; 1995. 302 p.

