


MEANING OF WORK TO PUBLIC SERVANTS WHO IMPLEMENT EMPLOYMENT POLICIES

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: To describe the sources of the meaning of work. This research was carried out with civil servants who implement employment policies in the Federal District of Brazil, trying to reintegrate people back into the labor market.

Originality/value: This work describes how the different sources affect the construction of the meaning of work. We include and test the service user as a relevant source for the meaning of work.

Design/methodology/approach: Qualitative design. It uses semi-structured interviews and content analysis with the previous model based on the Rosso, Dekas, and Wrzesniewski (2010) directions.

Findings: Three of the four proposed sources of the meaning of work were found: Self, Others, and Context. The Spiritual Life source does not arise in the content analysis. The most frequent source was Context, followed by Others and Self. Work Design was the most frequent theme in the Others category. It suggests that the relation between the job and self is core to the meaning of work. Not all proposed themes by the authors emerge in each category. Finally, in the Others source, the service user frequently emerges, indicating its pertinence to the meaning of work. Explanatory hypotheses are discussed for the sources and themes that emerge.

KEYWORDS

Employment. Sources of the meaning of work. Civil servants. Meaning of work.

1. INTRODUCTION

Public Employment Policies ([Políticas Públicas de Emprego] PPEs) are inserted in Social Policies, which are defined as actions that determine the pattern of protection and social justice implemented by the State, addressed, in principle, for the redistribution of social benefits, aiming at reducing structural inequalities (Cardoso & Jaccoud, 2005). The 1988 Constitution alters the social intervention of the State, extending the actions of social rights and the field of social protection of citizens under state responsibility, with relevant impacts, regarding the design of Social Policies. In the midst of these advances, we highlight the institution of Social Security and the Unified Health System; the obligation of Education, with regard to elementary education; the recognition of Social Assistance, Retirement, and of Unemployment Insurance (Brasil, 1988).

Unemployment Insurance is one of the main programs that compose the PPEs and was regulated by the law for the creation of the Workers' Assistance Fund ([Fundo de Amparo ao Trabalhador] FAT) (Brasil, 1990). According to the annual report of the International Labour Organization (2017), unemployment in 2017 was estimated at 201 million people around the world or 5.8% of the workforce. The unemployment rate in Brazil stood at 11.8% of the population, meaning that there were 12.3 million people unemployed (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística [IBGE], 2017).

Faced with this situation, the problem is no longer exclusively economic, becoming an eminently social problem, lacking PPEs to reverse this situation. In this sense, the responsibility of the State and, consequently, of the public agents that work directly with the PPEs, increases significantly, to reduce this serious social problem. The agents, the focus of this research, responsible for the implementation of PPEs, which deal directly with the unemployed, perform their activities, sometimes in adverse situations and without due recognition by the managers and the public that they attend to; a public who in some cases present serious problems due to their condition of unemployment (Peiró, Prieto, & Roe, 1996; Vasques-Menezes & Soratto, 2010a). In light of these perspectives, the object of this research is inserted: the meaning attributed to the work by the public agents in the execution of the PPEs of the FD.

Recently Rosso, Dekas, and Wrzesniewski (2010) conducted a review about the meaning of work and proposed that future approaches of the theme take into account two fundamental questions: where does the meaning of the work come from? (i.e., the sources of the meaning) and how



does the work become meaningful? (i.e., the psychological and social mechanisms that explain it). In this sense, these authors proposed a new theoretical reading and constructed a new form of grouping to perform the analysis of the meaning of the work that was structured according to 1. the sources of the meaning of the work; and 2. the mechanisms by which the work becomes significant.

The aims of this research are to investigate the meaning of work to public servants that work in the PPEs of the Federal District, to identify the sources of the meaning of work and to describe how these sources impact the construction of the meaning of work. We opt to follow the approach suggested by Rosso, Dekas, and Wrzesniewski (2010) and carry out this study based on the main sources of the meaning of work suggested by the authors: the self, others, work context, and spiritual life, which are described afterward.

To achieve these aims, a qualitative approach was used, conducting semi-structured interviews with public servants that work directly with the PPEs in the Labor Secretariat of the Federal District ([Secretaria de Trabalho do Distrito Federal] STb-DF). We opt for a qualitative approach based on two criteria: the focus of the analysis being in the perception of different social interactions as sources of the meaning of work, and to develop initial understandings in a less explored area—sources of meaning (Levitt, Bamberg, Creswell, Frost, & Suárez-Orozco, 2018).

2. EMPLOYMENT POLICIES IN BRAZIL

Social Policies are implemented by the governments to meet needs, mainly of those most in need, through a network of social protection. The PPEs have been growing in importance in the face of the increased unemployment in the world. Due to the relevance of (un)employment, the governments of different countries have developed public policies (Peiró, Prieto, & Roe, 1996) to ameliorate the problems experienced by job seekers.

In Brazil, the first actions to implement PPEs only started in the 1960s with the incorporation of social security, the insurance schemes for accidents at work and occupational diseases, and the Government Severance Indemnity Fund for Employees ([Fundo de Garantia do Tempo de Serviço] FGTS). These social policies were implemented to attend to the problems of population growth, rural exodus and the expansion of the urban areas that increased the available workforce in the cities (Cacciamali, 2011). In 1975,



to meet the determinations of the 88th International Labor Organization Convention, the National Employment System ([Sistema Nacional de Emprego] SINE) was established by the decree-law 76.403/1975, the first social policy draft of PPEs.

The regulation of the new institutional structure for financing unemployment insurance occurred only in 1990, under the Law 7.998/90, which created the FAT, and the Deliberative Council of the Workers' Assistance Fund ([Conselho Deliberativo do Fundo de Amparo ao Trabalhador] Codefat). At that moment, a Public Employment System in the country began to form together with an effective program of protection for the unemployed worker. Several of their policies had existed before but have been disjointed. The FAT resources from the PIS/Pasep collection represent approximately 1% of GDP.

It is worth mentioning that the Unemployment Insurance Program has three basic components: the benefit, the intermediation of labor and professional training. According to the External Evaluation of the Unemployment Insurance Program, held in 2009 (Marinho & Balestro, 2009), the PPEs had a well-structured technical and political-institutional framework, guided by the coordinate action of the three levels of the government and different governmental and non-governmental organizations. Decentralization, the intersectoral approach, and social control are the core principles of the implementation of these policies.

It was also found that, despite the design of the PPEs being well-structured and relevant, adequacy and integration between the actions of the basic components are lacking. Another cited problem was that the PPEs are not always adjusted to the socioeconomic reality of the regions and states. It is believed that the guiding principle of the policies should be the worker. The complex organizational structure, the non-standardized routine of work, the low level of transparency and flow of information are challenges confronted by those who implemented the PPEs. The problems of state and municipal political interference, and also inoperability compromise the results of the work of public servants involved in the development of PPEs (Marinho & Balestro, 2009). This context has an impact on the construction of the meaning of work.

In light of these arguments, it can be seen that, despite these problems, the PPEs provide a fundamental right that goes beyond economic and financial circumstances. Consequently, they should be improved, expanded and consolidated as a policy of social protection and citizenship-building, requiring adjustment to become more efficient. This efficiency depends, among other



things, on the public agents who execute them, and discovering the meaning of work for these (un)employment policy agents seems the logical deduction, but this has never been done, and it is not known what conceptions these people have about their tasks that, in addition to the individual impact of work, impacts on the public they deal with: the unemployed.

3. PUBLIC SERVANTS

Civil servants are all public servants, formally hired or not, that execute their activities in government organizations. Civil servants are the main executors of the PPEs, but there is no agreement on the definition of Civil Servant (Dallari, 1989, Di Pietro, 2006). The civil servants that execute the PPEs in the Federal District are both formally hired, and commissioned posts (i.e., not formally hired), thus generating discontinuity and administrative instability (Spink, Clemente, & Keppke, 2001). Although in other Federal Units there are other kinds of public servants such as people hired by third-party companies or NGOs, in the Federal District these practices are not currently applied. In this sense, the definition of civil servants becomes relevant.

Farah (2000) points out that instability and discontinuity in public administration and general disengagement, widespread in public administration and policies, have an impact on social policies. As PPEs are inserted primarily in Social Policies, such actions must be understood in order to understand the performance of public servants who carry out their activities in the implementation of PPEs.

According to research conducted by Vasques-Menezes and Soratto (2010a), in the form of a census carried out at SINE stations distributed throughout the country, most of the civil servants that perform their duties in the execution of PPEs are between adulthood and middle age, 25% between 30 and 40 years old, and around 40% above 40 years old. 44.6% are civil servants who are formally hired—in other words, less than half of the total. The others are assigned or commissioned, 36% of which are on temporary contracts, suggesting the administrative discontinuity already highlighted. The main difficulties of these civil servants are related to the lack of material conditions and physical and human structure (therefore contextual), and little is known about how this impacts on the construction of the meaning of work.



4. WORK/EMPLOYMENT/UNEMPLOYMENT

The understanding of work, employment and unemployment and its consequences in the lives of workers are relevant to this study because these themes are part of the main actions carried out by civil servants through the PPEs. It should be emphasized that these agents work with a dichotomy: they are civil servants, therefore stable and interpreted as privileged (job holders), and their activities are geared towards people who are looking for a job.

Man is humanized and gives meaning to life through work and finds fulfillment through it (Codo, 1995). Lack of work and employment can damage the mental and physical health (Borges & Tamayo, 2001; Dejours, 1992). The meaning of work used to be associated with survival, but work and the means of production have changed. With the industrial revolution, slave labor disappeared, and wage labor appeared. The idea of employment, among others, was born. The modern connotation of the term employment reflects a stable relationship between the individual and the organization where a productive task is performed, and by which income is received and goods or services are subject to market transactions (Souza, 1986).

According to Salanova, Gracia, and Peiró (1996), work is intentional, has an intended result, carries a certain nature of the obligation, and is done for something in return. However, conceptions of work have undergone many transformations throughout history (Blanch, 2003; Borges & Yamamoto, 2014). People can have a job, but not be formally hired. Employment means that the individual receives remuneration, but work is not necessarily remunerated. However, in the understanding of the SEAD Foundation and the DIEESE (n.d.), employees are individuals who have paid work performed regularly; or have paid work performed irregularly but are not looking for other work; or have unpaid work in the business support of relatives, or are remunerated in kind/benefit, without searching for work. The central point is that employed people are those that are not looking for a job.

People search for a job not only to support themselves, but also to establish social relations (Centeno, Erskine, & Pedrosa, 2000; Peiró, Prieto, & Roe, 1996). It is through the work that the person is included in society, guarantees their status and obtains social recognition. For Wickert (1999) work is the access road to the social place, because the subject only has the recognition of their existence if they produce. When the person is not productive, their social place no longer exists. In this sense, social interactions are important in the construction of the meaning of work.



As such, the lack of a job can cause pain and suffering (Dejours, 1992). Unemployment is also a cause of illness; inasmuch as it disrupts families relations, and breaks social and affective links (Rocha, Carvalho, & Barreto, 1999). Under adverse conditions, the higher the importance attributed to work, the greater the negative consequences to health.

Unemployment is not solely an economic concern. It is also known as a problem in other political spheres, such as health. The loss of a formal job can lead to the emergence of several problems on an individual level such as physical and mental pathologies, and on a social level as violence, transgressions, and delinquency (Jahoda, 1987; Silva, 2006).

For Jahoda (1987), work has a social and psychical function, and its lack can cause pain and illness. The unemployment situation undermines and affects the subjective condition of the subject, resulting in distinct emotional, psychological, physical, behavioral, familial, economic, professional and social reactions. Expulsion from the world of work and, consequently, social exclusion, serves to remove the meaning of an important part of life. (Antunes, 2003). The civil servants that work with PPEs have, therefore, a contrast: them, the employed civil servants, and the unemployed that they serve.

5. MEANING OF WORK

Frankl (1959) states that man's main concern is not to get pleasure or avoid pain, but rather to give meaning to his life. There are a number of definitions about what the meaning of work is, and some mention aspects of its process of creation, but what kind of information is offered by each organizational actor is less treated (Wrzesniewski, Dutton, & Debebe, 2003). Morin (2001), following the idea of Hackman and Oldham (1975), defines the meaning of work as an effective structure formed by three components: meaning, orientation, and coherency. Still, from Morin's (2001) perspective, the meaning of work is related to the representation or definition that the individual has of their tasks and to the values that they attribute to working. The orientation is related to what the individual looks for in work and how it guides their actions. The coherency is related to the balance between the individual and the work through their expectations, gestures, and values. However, the role of others in work relations in this process is less cited, and it is interpreted more as an individual process (Wrzesniewski, Dutton, & Debebe, 2003).



For Dejours (1992), work needs to make sense to the individual subject, their peers and for society. The meaningful content of the work allows the construction of the personal and social identity of the worker, through the tasks that they perform in their work, allowing them to be able to identify with what they perform. The deep meaning of work for each individual is personal, being created from the particular technics developed by each subject (Dejours, 1992). Similarly, Codo (1995), inspired by Marx, affirms that it is through work that the act of giving meaning to nature is made concrete. It also emphasizes that not only the way work is performed (activity), but also what results from this work (the product), is important in the construction of human identity, and both factors relate to the question of its meaning and of the satisfaction obtained through it. Dejours (1992) and Codo (1995) specify the construction of the meaning of work as the relation of the task with the practice of work (Bendassolli & Borges-Andrade, 2011). This relation between individual and work is a central part of the majority of the meaning of work definitions, but it is only part of the figure (Wrzesniewski, Dutton, & Debebe, 2003).

The Meaning of Work (MOW) conceptualized the meaning of work as a multidimensional and dynamic psychological construct, formed from the interaction between personal and environmental variables and influenced by changes in the individual, around them or at work (Kubo, Gouvêa, Melina, & Mantovani, 2013). These researchers have established the following dimensions for meaning: centrality of work (importance attributed to it in a person's life at any given time), social norms about work (derived from work-related moral values), and results and goals of work (related to the motivations that lead to work) (Blanch, 2003; Kubo et al., 2013; Tolfo & Piccinini, 2007). It is important to note that this multidimensional definition brings social norms about work as a reference to social actors at work since there is no social norm without a shared social role, but the group is non-specific when dealing with the process of its construction.

The main empirical studies of meanings of work carried out in Brazil are very recent, dating back to the 1980s and have found their bases in the works developed by MOW (Tolfo, Coutinho, Baasch, & Cugnier, 2011; Kruger, Pérez-Nebra, & Antloga, 2011), especially those inserted in the cognitive and humanistic approaches (Kruger, Pérez-Nebra, & Antloga, 2016). But Brazilian works, like international literature, have given more attention to the relation between the task and the self, with less attention given to the process of construction of meaning and the actors involved in it. Despite less attention being given, some authors nevertheless mention



the construction of meaning or the actors. Tolfo et al. (2011) affirm that the meaning of work recalls a subjective process that involves as much the individual history as its social insertion. Meaning also consists of constructions collectively elaborated in a particular historical, economic and social context. Therefore, these authors affirm that the construction of meaning is collective, meaning that others give information and tips on how one should feel and interpret one's work. Although Tolfo et al. (2011) affirm that the construction is collective, they are non-specific about which are the possible actors that can contribute to the construction of the meaning of the work.

In Borges' (Borges, 1997; Borges, 1999; Borges & Alves Filho, 2001; Borges & Tamayo, 2001) proposal, the meaning of work is multifaceted, as MOW presents. The concept of the meaning of work consists of the way each individual mentally organizes the meaning in the several facets that compose it: work centrality, descriptive and evaluative attributes, the hierarchy of attributes. Work centrality is the importance attributed to the work compared to the other life spheres (family, work, religion, leisure, and community). Evaluative attributes refer to the characteristics attributed to the work and define it as it "should be". The descriptive attributes describe the perception of work how it really is—in other words, how each person mentally represents it. The attribute hierarchy is the hierarchical organization of the characteristics attributed to the work by the individual. It consists of the organization of the various values and descriptive attributes according to their order of importance (Borges, 1997). According to Borges (1997), the meaning of work can be understood as a dynamic subjective social cognition. Subjective because it presents an individual variation that reflects the personal history. Social for presenting aspects shared by a group of individuals and for reflecting the historical conditions of the society in which it is inserted. Finally, dynamic because it is an unfinished construct, in a constant building process. This denotes that the meanings are affective-cognitive components of the human condition, elaborated by the individual in their relationship with society. Similarly to Tolfo et al. (2011), Borges, even if affirming the importance of social interactions, leaves a gap on its impact in the building process and the specification of the roles of its interactions in the meaning of work.

Not only has the focus of research been on the meaning of work in general, but it has also been on the meaning of work to civil servants. For Tavares (2003), who surveyed civil servants, injustice in the workplace and a lack of recognition and autonomy can cause suffering and frustration of



human needs and professional expectations, and can also influence the meaning of work, but he did not advance the proposal.

Vasques-Menezes and Soratto (2010a) conducted research with civil servants who developed their work in the implementation of PPEs (the focus of the present work), and demonstrated that, as they act directly with the unemployed, these civil servants carry great social importance. They also concluded that certain facts could influence the meaning that the employees attribute to their work, such as identification with the work performed, recognition for competence, skills, efforts and the result achieved. The public they deal with (the unemployed) are often in a state of suffering, sadness, irritation, and anguish. These civil servants face problems in carrying out their activities due to a lack of material conditions, technical support, equipment and physical structure. Other problems pointed out by the authors are the unsatisfactory results of their work, the lack of control, excessive routine, work overload and psychic pain (Vasques-Menezes & Soratto, 2010a), which can, in turn, cause a distortion of the meaning of work, attributing a negative meaning. In light of the vast number of researchers who are interested in studying this subject, Rosso, Dekas, and Wrzesniewski (2010) structured their review by dividing the theme into two fundamental questions: where does the meaning of the work come from? (meaning sources) and how does the work become meaningful? (mechanisms of the meaning). They proposed a new theoretical reading and constructed a new form of grouping to perform the analysis on the meaning of work that was structured according to the sources of the meaning of work and the mechanisms by which the work becomes meaningful.

With regard to the sources from which the meaning of the work derives, the analysis by Rosso, Dekas, and Wrzesniewski (2010) revealed that, in the literature, four main sources are found: the Self, Others, the Work Context and the Spiritual Life. They also understood that work becomes significant by the following mechanisms: authenticity, self-efficacy, self-esteem, life purpose, sense of belonging, transcendence, and the construction of a cultural or interpersonal sense. An exploratory study on the mechanisms of construction of the meaning of work, albeit with a dissimilar task, was carried out by Kruger et al. (2016). However, the sources of meaning were not dealt with. Thus, in the research presented here, we have opted to analyze the sources of the meaning of work, following the suggestions of Rosso, Dekas, and Wrzesniewski (2010).

The Self-source is organized in the following themes: values, motivation, and beliefs, which can influence the individual's perceptions about the



meaning of work (Rosso, Dekas, & Wrzesniewski, 2010). Values, probably the most studied theme, has already been categorized in different ways, varying between different purposes (Tamayo, 1994), and sometimes the values, motivation, and beliefs theories overlap, which challenge its analysis.

The Others source indicates how the individual interactions with other people or groups, in or out of the work environment, influence the meaning of work. Rosso, Dekas, and Wrzesniewski (2010) suggest as Others: work for colleagues, leaders, groups and community, and family. In this research, we propose to include and test the unemployed as a source of meaning. This proposition is inspired by Wrzesniewski et al. (2003) who suggested years ago that the client, user or consumer would help in the construction of the meaning of work. As such, the first hypothesis of this work is that the unemployed, in the interpretation of the main user of the service, will emerge as a category that assists in the construction of the meaning of work.

In examining the role of Context as a source of meaning for work, researchers Rosso, Dekas, and Wrzesniewski (2010) suggest that the environment in which work is performed significantly influences the perception of meaning. To facilitate a better understanding, the authors suggest special attention to be given to the work design, the organizational mission, the financial situation, the non-work domains and the national culture in which the work is carried out. The Context source, and particularly Work Design, is predominant in the literature on the meaning of work, since the central element in the description of the meanings of work is the praxis involved (Bendassolli & Borges-Andrade, 2011). Thus, the second hypothesis is that this source will be predominant in the interviews.

According to Rosso, Dekas, and Wrzesniewski (2010), although an intersection between work and the Spiritual Life is recognized, there is still a shortage of studies on the subject. Two facets compose the Spiritual Life category: spirituality and sacred calling. This shortage of studies can be justified based on cultural norms that cause segregation between work and religion (Tamayo, 1994). The third hypothesis of this work is that the categories proposed by Rosso, Dekas, and Wrzesniewski (2010) will emerge in the analysis conducted.

6. METHODS AND RESEARCH PROCEDURES

It is a qualitative, transversal approach, based on semi-structured interviews with civil servants that work directly with Employment Policies, in the STb-DF. The participation criteria were that the workers were linked to



the STb-DF, preferentially with high levels of experience and knowledge of the different facets of the STb work: both administrative and in dealing with the unemployed. Eight civil servants from a total of 35 were interviewed, five women and three men, aged between 29 and 62 years. With regard to schooling, five had higher level education, and three had high school level education. Of the eight interviewees, seven had been working at STb-DF for over twenty years and one for three years. Finally, the sample was composed of managers and administrative workers, of whom seven had directly dealt with the unemployed, therefore having an understanding of the work routine.

The themes elaborated during the interviews followed a script previously elaborated relating to the sources of the meaning of work. The interviews were scheduled in advance and conducted in small groups (three and two civil servants). Only one was conducted individually due to the unavailability of the other civil servants at that moment. The interview length varied according to the number of participants and the capacity and openness of each one to express themselves (the average was 45 minutes). The group interview aimed to optimize the process, observe the similarity and difference in opinions and experiences and aggregate diversity of answers (Morgan, 1987).

We noted that as the participants knew each other, they complemented their answers, as expected in these kinds of interviews. However, when divergences appeared, they presented their opinion without inhibition or embarrassment.

Following the procedures proposed by Bardin (1977, 2011) and Braun and Clark (2006), the corpus was analyzed by themes, and these are grouped by categories. The previous model used as criteria were the sources of the meaning of work suggested by Rosso, Dekas, and Wrzesniewski (2010). In spite of this previous model, characteristic symptoms of Burnout Syndrome were present in the testimonials.

Only three of the four proposed sources emerged in the analysis: the Self, Others, and the Work Context. The last source, Spiritual Life, was not analyzed in this research because there was no reference to it during the interviews. As such, the themes were grouped according to the three sources mentioned above.

7. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results suggest that the public service is a rich space in the construction of meanings, despite being full of contradictions, with regard to feelings and achievements at work. In order to make it possible to

systematize the analysis of thematic categorical content, the sources of the meaning of work proposed by Rosso, Dekas, and Wrzesniewski (2010) were defined as previously established categories. The Figure 7.1 shows the frequency with which themes emerged in each category (source).

(Figure 7.1)

FREQUENCY OF JOB CATEGORIES/SOURCES OF MEANING

Source	F Total	Themes	Examples	F Themes
Self	16	Values	"I am sure that this work will have a spill-over effect to the next, to the worker"	6
		Motivation	"It is my personal fulfillment, my joy, my livelihood. It is my safety and tranquility. I love working"	5
		Beliefs	"our expectancy is that it will improve. Spend some time, and we became frustrated because things do not go forward"	5
Others	30	Unemployed	"I think mainly of them [the unemployed]"	15
		Leadership	"the guys who should be in the management of these public policies are politically appointed people. They have no idea what they are, nor have the time to qualify themselves to implement them"	11
		Co-workers	"There is no team, ... there are no people that believe in the work, and they don't know how the policies should be implemented"	4
Work context	62	Work design	"I guess the worst evil in this question is the administrative discontinuity. You don't have continuity. What exists today, doesn't exist tomorrow"	43
		Organizational mission	"Because, on paper, we have everything designed. The projects are beautiful. But when it arrives at the point of implementation. . ."	11
		Financial situation	"Work for me is a pleasure. It is through it that I live"	4
		Local cultural	"I guess the public interest became secondary because new political relations come"	4

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

As can be seen in Figure 7.1, the interviewees' statements showed that, with regard to the sources of the meaning of work, the Context source appears more frequently (62 times) than the Self-source (16 times), emphasizing that the context source is the most accessible or the most important for this group of respondents. Thus, Hypothesis 2 of this work was confirmed because the context source, work design theme was predominant (Bendassolli & Borges-Andrade, 2011; Wrzesniewski, Dutton, & Debebe, 2003).

When we analyze the Self-source, it is possible to note that individual values, motivations, and beliefs are equally cited, suggesting that there are cultural and social influences that guide the civil servants' behaviors and attitudes, allowing the maintenance of the desire and interest to keep developing their tasks, but it is not as marked as the other sources.

Regarding the Others category, that is, how interactions with different people can influence the construction of the meaning of work, the themes that appeared during the interviews were: co-workers, leaders (managers) and the unemployed. Although the Family theme was considered to influence the construction of the meaning of work, none of the civil servants made references to their families during the interviews. Co-workers and leaders were previously expected as a source by Rosso, Dekas, and Wrzesniewski (2010). However, as the unemployed are the target clientele of the interviewees, it was decided to include them in this category, which, in turn, was the most recurrent topic in the interviews, followed by managers and co-workers. This supports the hypothesis of this work where the consumer, user or client is a source that helps in the construction of the meaning of work. Moreover, these results point to some explanatory hypotheses regarding the intensity of this theme: there may be a great concern with the clientele served by the civil servants that implement the PPEs in the DF, the contrast between the privileged (formally hired) versus the disadvantaged (unemployed) can also emerge in the work routine, the internal and external media can have an influence on the answers in the hypothesis of agenda setting (Pérez-Nebra, Dias, & Torres, 2014), the task destined for this clientele generates accessibility of memory, and there may be social desirability in the given responses. These explanatory hypotheses will remain open for future studies.

In order to analyze the Context source, Rosso, Dekas, and Wrzesniewski (2010) included as themes that determine the meaning of work: the work design, the organizational mission, the financial situation, the non-work domains and the national culture in which the work is done. The results



suggested that the major source of the meaning of the work of the civil servants is in the context. The themes that most emerged in this source were those related to the work design, where the authors refer to the conditions and work environment and the levels of autonomy and identity with the task. Here we also included the human resources available to execute the activities, where we make a counterpoint with the Others source, where we observe interpersonal relations between co-workers.

In the work context, one can note the dissatisfaction shown by the interviewees, when referring to the civil servants that are hired by political indication and without public tender. Vasques-Menezes and Soratto (2010a) reported this distortion when affirming that in the Employment Agency only 44.6% of the public servants had made public tender—in other words, less than half, and thus, as it can be seen, it influences attitudes and behaviors.

Authors such as Di Pietro (2006), Farah (2000), Spink, Clemente, and Keppke (2001) believe that administrative discontinuity, common in public administration, is associated with political interferences and changes in the leaders' interests. For Rosso, Dekas, and Wrzesniewski (2010), the leaders should instill the work with meaning and serve as an inspiration to transform their own interests into a greater collective purpose. However, based on these results, what can be seen is that they do not exhibit collective interests on the contrary, they seek their own conveniences and for the political parties that they are part of. The lack of trust in the actions and interactions with the leaders negatively interfere in the meaning of work conceptions and can discourage the public servants to improve their performance in the development of the PPEs in the FD, as this does not fit with their personal values.

The PPEs that emerged eleven times in the narratives were allocated in the organizational mission, as the main purpose of the organization is the employment policies. However, on this subject, there was a specific question, serving as a warm-up during the interviews. As for the financial situation, this emerged four times during the interviews, while the local culture was cited the same number of times (four) by the interviewees. The topic of “non-work domain” did not appear during interviews. The last theme is about the connection between work and non-work, in particular, possible conflicts between personal values or motivations (e.g., family, varied life). This result partially refutes Hypothesis 3 of the work in which the various themes related to the categories of the process of construction of the meaning of the work would appear. What can be noticed is that not all categories and themes emerged. In this specific case, while it can be explained that the domain of non-work may not have emerged because it is not a conflict for



this group of individuals according to the context and characteristics of the sample (formally hired, well paid, senior in their careers), it emerges in another category (e.g., Others).

Assuming that meaningful work should be morally acceptable and needs satisfactory human relations, it can be understood that the civil servants need to improve their relations with their co-workers and restore the belief in their leaders, to improve their meaning of work and to enable work satisfaction and more efficiency in their activities (Morin, 2001). Despite all these statements, the research results lead one to believe that the social and interpersonal processes that make up the Others source are more relevant to the agents interviewed than the pursuit of their individual goals (Self-source). Possible explanations could be negative bias in the case of Others (lots of complaints) and response to social norms (social desirability) where it is more acceptable to say “I do” for others and not for yourself.

Based on the analysis of the statements, it is possible to note that the Context source, namely: work conditions, work environment, autonomy and task identity, shows the greatest accessibility in the perception of the meaning of work. However, the results refer to a difficult work context, similar to that pointed out by Vasques-Menezes and Soratto (2010b), when they analyzed SINE’s civil servants, with lack of control over work, unsatisfactory results of work and psychological suffering. These difficulties may have negative implications for the meaning of work, since there is a paradoxical process in which, at the same time as work provokes pleasure and fulfillment, it also causes pain and suffering (Mendes, 2008). These contradictions are perceived when they state that, however, their dissatisfaction, they still have the motivation to keep working. This antagonistic process can be understood as a coping strategy, needed to maintain the psychological balance that allows these public agents to keep working, seeking positive facts in order to continue with their tasks, perhaps because of their good income and the stability that is given to career civil servants.

Based on the results of this research, there were also indications of Burnout Syndrome, when finding that there is difficulty in realizing some affective bonds. This phenomenon was predicted by Rosso, Dekas, and Wrzesniewski (2010) when they stated that the emergence of the Burnout Syndrome is possible in the way people build their meaning of work. Vasques-Menezes and Soratto (2010b) confirm that this syndrome can frequently appear in the SINE civil servants, from apathy to excessive identification with their unemployed clientele.

In view of these perspectives, it can be seen that, despite the difficulties faced, the meaning attributed to work by public agents in the implementation of PPEs in the Federal District has a strong influence on the formation of their identity, allowing them to recognize themselves as individuals within the social context of which they are part. It is also understood that the public institution in which they provide services constitutes the main space for the construction of the meaning of work and that the way in which this institution operates interferes directly with the way the work is performed and the satisfaction obtained through it.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The results obtained suggest that the proposed objective was reached because the sources of meaning were identified and the ways in which these sources impact the construction of the meaning of the work were described. Based on the results of this research, the motivation, individual values, and beliefs of the respondents are preserved (Self-source), which, according to Blanch (2003), helps to cope with adverse working conditions and safeguards job satisfaction.

Regarding the Others source, it is verified that, although the agents are interested in the unemployed, who are the external clientele, internally there is little cooperation among co-workers, and there is a lack of commitment of the managers in the activities carried out. It should be pointed out that the reflections based on the results obtained in this research make it possible to propose new forms of intervention in the implementation of PPEs in the Federal District, in order to guarantee the improvement of the services provided to the population who needs this service in order to be reintegrated into the labor market. In relation to the Context source, it predominates in the construction of the meaning of the work, because it is within this that the praxis of work is realized (Bendassolli & Borges-Andrade, 2011) and appears as a central element in most definitions related to work (Wrzesniewski, Dutton, & Debebe, 2003).

This work is not free of limitation. The sample is small, but among those who worked with the PPEs were those who were willing to participate. Moreover, the variety of categories and work functions could enrich the analysis, but it would escape the aim of this work. There are open explanatory hypotheses to be tested in future studies on the sources of the meaning of work.

Finally, it is important to leave as a suggestion that future studies be carried out incorporating other methodological approaches on the sources of the meaning of the work and covering the mechanisms by which the meanings are attributed.

SIGNIFICADO DO TRABALHO PARA AGENTES PÚBLICOS QUE EXECUTAM AS POLÍTICAS DE EMPREGO

RESUMO

Objetivo: Descrever as fontes de significado do trabalho. Esta pesquisa foi realizada com agentes públicos que executam as Políticas de Emprego no Distrito Federal, ou seja, que estão expostos à dicotomia: servidores públicos concursados que desempenham suas atividades, justamente, na tentativa de reinserir pessoas no mercado de trabalho.

Originalidade/relevância: Este trabalho descreve como as diferentes fontes afetam na construção do significado do trabalho. Testa-se a inclusão da fonte relativa ao usuário do serviço como pertinente à construção do significado do trabalho.

Principais aspectos metodológicos: Foi adotado o método qualitativo, por meio de entrevistas semiestruturadas e análise de conteúdo com modelo prévio a partir dos direcionamentos propostos por Rosso, Dekas e Wrzesniewski (2010).

Síntese dos principais resultados: Foram encontradas três das quatro fontes de significado do trabalho propostas: Eu, Outros e Contexto. A fonte Vida Espiritual não emergiu nas análises. A fonte mais frequente foi a Contexto, seguida de Outros e Eu. O Desenho de Tarefas de Trabalho foi o tema mais frequente na categoria. Outros, sugerindo que a relação entre tarefa e o Eu é central na construção do significado do trabalho. Nem todos os temas propostos pelos autores vêm à tona nas categorias. Finalmente, na fonte Outros, emerge com frequência o usuário do serviço indicando sua pertinência para a construção do significado do trabalho. Discute-se hipóteses explicativas para cada as fontes e temáticas.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Emprego. Fontes de significado do trabalho. Agentes públicos. Significado do trabalho.



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