
BETWEEN HEAVEN AND HELL: THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS AT WORK TO QUALITY OF WORK LIFE PERCEPTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Interpersonal relations at work are vital to quality of work life. They characterize a source of well-being and ill-being at the workplace. However, even though this relation has been consistently suggested in the literature, a gap remains in understanding the employees' perception of this importance. The main goal of this article was to investigate the importance of interpersonal relations at work to quality of work life perceptions in employees' perspective. 699 employees from an organization of the Brazilian judiciary participated. Qualitative and quantitative analysis were performed. The results confirmed the global hypothesis and indicate that interpersonal relations occupy a central role in quality of work life promotion.

Keywords: *interpersonal relationships at work, quality of work life.*

INTRODUCTION

“Some supervisors are turning the workplace into a living hell.”
“When I think of my work, the thing that makes me feel comfortable is the good relationship with my colleagues”
Brazilian judiciary civil servants

The quotes chosen as the epigraph of this article do not seem to provide any new information. The positive influence of interpersonal relations in quality of work life seems to have, at first, such evident importance that one would expect it to be widely studied. However, this interest has not been established, nor widely investigated. This statement can be supported by the lack of studies that investigate the topic in the scientific literature.

The interest aroused by the relationship between subordinates and their supervisors and by the impact that the behavior of the latter exerts on the former also seems to be established at first glance. This feeling is reinforced when issues repeatedly studied in this area of interest, and questions coming from affiliated research that these issues pose, such as leadership (Clement, 1994; Schoel, Bluemke, M., Muller, P., & Stahlberg, 2011) and supervisor behavior (Benckhamm, Menkhoff, & Suto, 2008; Longenecker, 2011) are addressed.

Still with respect to supervisors, but focusing on the quality of work life (QWL), some dated studies focused on investigating how managers can take appropriate actions to improve employees' QWL (Schlesinger & Oshry, 1982) and some more recent ones focused on identifying the difficulties managers may find trying to promote

QWL in the workplace (RR Ferreira, Ferreira, Antloga, & Bergamaschi, 2009). However, the perception of the role of the relationship between managers and employees towards the promotion of QWL as well as well-being and ill-being experiences in the workplace are still incipient.

In addition to the workers' relationship with managers, the relationships between colleagues also play an important role for well-being promotion and its understanding in the context of goods and services production. Teamwork is a common practice nowadays and this form of work organization has been promoted increasingly, a fact that has made it a standard unit (Ahmad, 2013; Hodson, 1997; Lim & Klein, 2006; Mathieu et al., 2005). Thus, coworker coexistence becomes more and more intense and, therefore, strategic in the organizational setting.

Nevertheless, there is still a gap regarding the impact that relations with coworkers have on the promotion and maintenance of QWL. Similarly, the effective impact that supervisors have on the way their subordinates experience QWL deserves attention. The aim of this study was to investigate the importance of interpersonal relations with regards to the experience of QWL from the perspective of employees in an organization of the Brazilian judiciary.

The scientific importance of this work lies in the fact that only few articles that directly address this relationship have been identified. This relevance is also evident when it is perceived that people assume importance for managers, consultants and researchers (Horta, Demo, & Roure, 2012). This importance can also be understood by the number of social relationships that are established in the workplace, the importance they have for people and for organizational objectives, and how they impact employees and are impacted by them.

INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AND QWL

This article focuses on interpersonal relationships in the workplace. As such, it contemplates two types of relationships: peer relationships and relationships with supervisors. Having this in mind, it is pertinent to contextualize the topic based on these two types of interpersonal relationships.

Focus on Managers

Work in organizations is traditionally inseparable from position and management assignments. As a requirement of management positions, the relationship between manager and subordinates (member of a team) is asymmetrically established and the superiority of the supervisor over subordinates gives the former the power to affect the working life of the latter. This impact also affects well-being and ill-being experiences in the organizational context.

Characteristics of the adopted management style can make the difference between strict managers and bad managers, resulting in the loss of support from those from whom outcomes are expected (Longenecker, 2011). Managers are also thought to influence the success of QWL policies. The little attention received by intermediary managers can affect the success of a QWL program and hence the experience of well-being and ill-being by employees (Schlesinger & Oshry, 1982).

Bad managers are considered arrogant and untrustworthy. They fail to create clear performance expectations, do not provide feedback nor show recognition, are unpredictable, take all of the credit, fail in team planning and development, do not solve problems, are incompetent and lack wisdom (Longenecker, 2011). These characteristics can mark a manager as the worst boss in a subordinate's working life. In this case, it is worth illustrating what Hogan and Kaiser (2005, p 169.) pointed out: "Bad leaders perpetrate terrible misery on those subject to their domain".

Also with respect to the negative consequences related to managers: if they fail to be concerned about the well-being of their subordinates, have interpersonal personality or relationship techniques that negatively affect the organizational climate, present with narcissistic disorders, undermine the effectiveness of subordinates and are motivated primarily by their own interests, these managers are considered by some authors to be toxic leaders (Doty & Fenlason, 2013; Reed & Olsen, 2010).

Known as the dark side of leadership (Hogan & Hogan, 2001), destructive leadership has also been a recent object of study. This includes bullying, abusive supervision, tyrannical management, toxic leadership, among other practices (Krasikova, Green, & LeBreton, 2013). Listed as a form of destructive leadership, abusive supervision leads subordinates to hide their emotions, resulting in poor QWL and increasing work-family conflict (Carlson, Ferguson, Huntter, & Whitten, 2012; Hoobler & Hu, 2013), emotional exhaustion (Chi & Liang, 2013; Harvey, Stoner, Hochwarter, & Kacmar, 2007) and in the intention to leave the organization (BJ Tepper et al., 2009).

As a result of this type of leadership, the literature indicates that destructive leadership affects subordinates and even people from outside the organization (e.g. customers), is stressful and harmful to subordinates, affecting their physical and psychological well-being, and undermines organizational-goal achievement (Schyn & Schilling, 2013; Shaw, Erickson, & Harvey, 2011). Findings also indicate that team members can block organizational goal-achievement in response to destructive leadership (BJ Tepper, Duffy, & Shaw, 2001).

As a positive influence, supervisor behavior has also been identified as crucial for the success of an organizational change processes. Supervisors need to demonstrate consistent and visible support in order to make it clear how that change will bring positive results to performance, company profitability and quality of work life (Clement, 1994).

Specific studies that focused on the direct impact of management on employee well-being reported that positive leadership is related to the experience of positive emotions and well-being (Kelloway, Weigand, McKee, & Das, 2013) and that transformational leadership affected well-being and perceptions of working conditions (Nielsen & Daniels, 2012). At the team level, empathic supervisors directly positively impacted their employees' daily somatic complaints and goal progress in relation to the experience of positive emotions at work (Scott, Colquitt, Paddock, & Judge, 2010).

Based on the studies analyzed, one can infer that the influence of managers on their subordinates through interpersonal relationships is relevant to broaden the understanding of the role of quality of work life perception. Leadership styles, behavior and manager behaviors have been identified as affecting the lives of subordinates, both positively and negatively. The polarization of these experiences highlights the ambivalence resulting from the relationship with the manager and needs to be better understood, starting from the employees' point of view.

Colleagues

Similarly, QWL studies that investigate the importance of relationships with colleagues for well-being in the workplace are still sparse. As stated by Hodson (1997, p. 426.): "The increased prevalence of team-orientation in organizations necessitates that we pay greater attention to the existing organizational relationships in light of team environment."

Despite this structural indication of the organizational context, the relationship with colleagues has played a secondary role in the interests of occupational psychology and related disciplines. As a result, much more is known about individual variables and the impact of work organization on the individual than about those relationships that have a great impact on well-being and ill-being experiences at work.

Even when interest is directed towards expanding the understanding of work groups and teams, in general, this is restricted to sharing perceptions and to the performance of these units. There is little attention to the relationship between colleagues and how this affects the organizational scenario. However, "coworkers can make a job a blessing or a curse" (Hodson, 1997, p. 426).

Similarly to what was said about supervisors, it can be deduced that this polarization of the consequences of interpersonal relationship is a fact. In the few articles devoted to understanding this relationship, the literature markedly indicates this ambivalence in relation to the consequences of interpersonal relationships with colleagues.

A group is one of the possible ways to relate with colleagues. Groups are, in essence, an inevitable phenomenon. People need to live, to belong and to affiliate. Colleagues can meet that need as well as provide support in times of crisis and help to relieve stress. This interaction happens naturally. Even if the organization's choice is not to form groups as the basic building blocks of the organization, they are spontaneously formed by colleagues (Leavitt, 1974). To devote interest to relationships with colleagues and teams means to optimize the positive effects that they have on the workplace context.

Relationships with colleagues have the potential to affect both organizational effectiveness and the quality of work life as indicated by Hackman and Walton (1986). In this sense, relations with coworkers not only help increase productivity, but also to determine work experience and its meaning.

With respect to the relevance of these relationships to the organization, it can be pointed out that "...the relationship with colleagues is essential for the success of modern organizations. Probably the most pervasive and powerful influence on compliance is influence from one's coworker" (Walton & Hackman, 1986, p. 172). This statement is central to understanding the need to know more about the relationship with colleagues. For Scolari, Costa and Mazzilli (2009), teamwork provides pleasure.

Emphasizing the need to study these relationships, studies indicate that the relationship between coworkers can provide a basis for solidarity and collective resistance to inefficient supervision. They also show that job satisfaction is positively affected by solidarity and negatively affected by conflict between colleagues (Hodson, 1997). They also demonstrate that support from colleagues is directly and positively correlated with well-being and that it reduces the negative effects of job demands (Sloan, 2012; Wallace & Lemaire, 2007).

On the other hand, groups can exploit, stress and frustrate their members (Hackman, Brousseau, & Weiss, 1976). Colleagues can also be a cause of discomfort at work when they exercise coercive control over each other (Barker, 1993). The unfair treatment of colleagues was associated with lower levels of satisfaction and high levels of psychological stress (Sloan, 2012). Relationships marked by conflict were also associated with ill-being experiences and with human labor costs (Veras & Ferreira, 2010).

Also in reference to the importance of colleagues as a source of ill-being at work, surveys relating to workplace bullying point out that this phenomenon is connected to the absence of positive social interactions at work (Notelaers, Witte, & Einarsen, 2010). Horizontal violence perpetrated by colleagues also characterizes another point on which interpersonal relationships with colleagues can affect QWL (Smith, 2013).

Peer interactions influence both well-being and ill-being. Besides, good relationships with colleagues allow negative impacts coming from work organization as well as from negative relationship with managers to be mitigated. Colleagues are essential for the maintenance of well-being in the workplace and for organizational happiness. Thus, it is very important to scientifically understand work relationships more profoundly and empirically.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

QWL has been hegemonically based on a theoretical welfare approach that constitutes the individual as an “adjustment variable”, with this view being widely adopted, especially in the implementation of programs and actions at the corporate level. However, this article is part of a strand that investigates ill-being prevention in corporate contexts and promotion of quality of work life. It is presented in a counter-hegemonic perspective that values the perception of individuals and the adaptation of work and its multiple attributes to human beings, revealing and intervening in the real sources of ill-being, not only in the symptoms (Ferreira Alves, & Tostes, 2009).

The guiding premise of this counter-hegemonic QWL approach is directed by the assumption of QWL as “a task for all and a constant search for harmony between well-being, efficiency and effectiveness in organizational environments” having as its “central focus, the removal of the problems that cause ill-being in the production context” (Ferreira, 2011, p. 287). In line with the perception that QWL is a task for all, Ahmad (2013) points out that QWL should be a responsibility shared by employees and supervisors. For this author, everyone has an important role to play in the QWL field.

About 40 years have passed since QWL appeared in the literature (Feuer 1989; Martel & Dupuis, 2006; Westley 1979). Many articles have been published and much research has been done since that time. Nevertheless, the definition of QWL, how to approach it and what its function is for public and private organizations is still surrounded by controversy.

The postwar economy gave the service area considerable leverage, reaching about 60% in the 1960s in the United States. However, this change in the market has not transformed work relations or the way of working, which remained marked by dehumanization (Davis & Cherno, 1975, quoted in Martel & Dupuis).

The increasing educational level of workers and the financial and market situation (Martel & Dupuis, 2006), aggravated by the oil crisis and the success of the Japanese model forced the United States to rethink their mode of production (Nadler & Lawler, 1989). The term QWL was first used by Irving Bluestone, from General Motors, in the late 1960s. The proliferation of interest in the field made QWL become an “umbrella term” in the late 1970s (Feuer, 1989).

Much of the interest, at that time, turned to productivity. That was the main goal in the opinion of employees, managers and the community (Martel & Dupuis, 2006). The perspective has evolved and QWL was defined as a variable (1969-1972), as an approach (1969-1975), as a method (1972-1975), as a movement (1975-1980), as a general concept – “everything” (1979-1982) and, in a disrepute phase, as “nothing” (Nadler & Lawler, 1989).

While QWL has been seen as a solution to multiple organizational problems (Feuer, 1989), QWL research has evolved along with the interests of managers and consultants. Management practices have sought to achieve

organizational goals making use of QWL. However, often times, the practices are restricted to a superficial level of application, consisting mainly of actions aimed at reducing stress, but, essentially, do not act on the sources of ill-being.

Hegemonically, QWL is summarized by authors as having “satisfaction, involvement, commitment, stress, autonomy, limited recognition of the superior hierarchy, and adequate remuneration, among others” as indicators (Medeiros & Ferreira, 2011, p. 16), emphasizing a more self-centered perspective. Although some studies theoretically approach the influence of interpersonal relations in QWL, this impact is not significantly reported by the literature yet.

Recently, in a targeted review of QWL paradigms, Ahmad (2013) suggests fields for intervention research in order to improve QWL that diverge from those traditionally identified in the literature. Among these, the author draws attention to the importance of intergroup relationships, to the manager and to teams. If one has the intention to intervene in these fields, it is necessary to know the employees’ perception about interpersonal relationships and QWL.

Traditionally, research related to QWL focuses on employee-labor relationships, leaving interpersonal relationships, especially with colleagues, in the background. In addition, aspects related to the importance of relations with managers and coworkers regarding QWL have been considered under a tangential view. Interpersonal relationships deserve more centralized attention. It can be expected that the role of colleagues and managers be of great importance in the way employees perceive QWL. Ferreira (2011) proposes the following definition of QWL:

From the perspective of the organization, it is an organizational management precept that is expressed by a set of standards, guidelines and practices in the scope of the conditions, of the organization and of interpersonal work relationships aimed at promoting individual and collective well-being, the personal development of employees and the practice of organizational citizenship. From the perspective of the employees, it is expressed through global representations that are built by them about the context in which they are inserted, indicating the predominance of well-being experiences at work, institutional and collective recognition, the chance for professional development and respect for individual characteristics (p. 285).

It is suggested that interpersonal relationships have an intimate connection with QWL. However, there is still a gap in the literature regarding the way employees perceive this premise. Few studies have been dedicated to this research. In this sense, the overall hypothesis of this research is that interpersonal relationships are indicated by employees as being critical in terms of their perception of QWL, contributing more significantly to well-being and ill-being experiences at work.

METHODS

This study was conducted in a public agency of the Brazilian judicial system and is methodologically based on the Franco-Belgian ergonomics activity approach. The core of this approach is the adaptation of work to man, situated in counter-hegemonic logic in the field of labor sciences. The investigation focused on the interpersonal relationships established in the context of this public body from the perspective of workers.

Participants

The staff of this public agency was composed of 1,652 workers. There were 842 participants who answered questionnaires; of these 699 were considered valid. This sample corresponds to 42.31% of the agency workers. 56% of the respondents were female. The number of respondents progressed according to age, each age group corresponding to five years: under 19 (1.6%), 20-24 (2.5%), and 40-44 (20.7%). In relation to education, 358 respondents (45.1%) had completed or were currently enrolled in a postgraduate degree. 45.8% of the workers were in administrative units located outside the agency’s headquarters. The number of vested respondents was 485 (68.3%).

Measures and Procedures

This study had a qualitative-quantitative design. Workers responded to the Quality of Work Life Assessment Inventory (QWL_AI). The QWL_AI is a self-report instrument composed, in its quantitative part, of 61 items on an 11-point Likert scale (from 0 = Strongly Disagree to 10 = Strongly Agree). This is a multifactorial instrument, being composed of the following factors: Working Conditions ($\alpha = 0.9$), Labor Organization ($\alpha = 0.73$), Interpersonal Work Relations ($\alpha = 0.89$), Recognition and Professional Development ($\alpha = 0.91$) and Work/Social Life Relationships ($\alpha = 0.8$).

The average of the items, factors and the overall QWL assessment (average of the factors) were categorized and interpreted based on psychometric cartography. This cartography is divided into three major categories: dominant ill-being, transition zone and dominant well-being. Each of the three categories are subdivided into two others. Dominant well-being is divided into moderate well-being and intense well-being. The transition zone is divided into positive tendency and negative tendency. Dominant ill-being is divided into intense ill-being and moderate ill-being.

The first category, dominant ill-being, represents a disease risk, indicating a negative result, which shows the predominance of ill-being representations at work (evaluations from 0 to 3.9). The transition zone indicates a threshold situation, a median result (4 to 5.9). Finally, the dominant well-being category involves health promotion, indicating a positive result and showing the predominance of well-being representations at the workplace.

QWL_AI also has a qualitative part consisting of four open-ended questions, as follows: “In my opinion, quality of work life is...”, “When I think of my work at [agency’s name], what most makes me feel comfortable is...”, “When I think of my work at [agency’s name], what most causes me discomfort is...” and finally, “Comments and Suggestions”. The QWL_AI was filled out individually on the Internet. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS software. The responses to the open-ended questions were analyzed using the software *AnalyseLexicale par Contexte d'un Ensemble of Segments of Texte* (Reinert, 1990).

The QWL_AI was accessed by participants after an initial instruction screen was displayed. The instructions contained: the aim of the study, the importance of participation and academic responsibility. The home screen also showed, based on the guidelines of Resolution MS196/96 from the Brazilian Health Council, ethical guidelines concerning: (a) voluntary participation; (b) the possibility to withdraw participation at any time without causing any damage or personal injury; (c) the absence of risks for work activities or for the agency; (d) ethical confidentiality dealing with the results and (e) the right to remain anonymous. At the end of the questionnaire, a command to save the data was triggered.

RESULTS

The quantitative results indicate that the overall hypothesis that interpersonal relationships play a central role in the experiences of well-being and ill-being at work is confirmed. Noting the importance of interpersonal relationships, the Interpersonal Working Relations factor averaged 7.24 (SD = 1.58), considered to be moderate well-being in the psychometric cartography. It was the second best ranked factor, having a slightly lower average than Social/Work Life Relationships (7.55; SD = 1.17). The latter, also perceived as moderate well-being, possessed great influence on its final score of items related to the sensation of usefulness regarding the work performed and happiness felt in the context of work to the detriment of other contexts.

Quality of Work Life in the organization studied, in general, was ranked with an average of 5.98 (SD = 1.24), being perceived by respondents as having a positive tendency in the transition zone of the QWL_AI psychometric cartography. The average for the Interpersonal Relationship factor was considerably higher than the overall average, as noted above. These results indicate that interpersonal relationships are well perceived in the organization.

Professional relationships may refer to colleagues as well as to supervisors. Two QWL_AI factors contain items that are more convergent with the research interest of this article: Interpersonal Working Relations and Recognition and Professional Growth (A: 4.93, SD: 2.34). Looking more closely at the content of these items in these factors, it is clear that items related to colleagues showed a more positive response tendency compared to items related to supervisors.

The Interpersonal Working Relations factor consisted of 16 items, six of them referring to supervision and four to colleagues. The best rated item of the factor referred to harmonious coexistence with colleagues (A: 8.76), reflecting intense well-being. Coexistence in the workplace received the same classification (8.19). Confidence in colleagues (A: 7.64) and willingness of colleagues to help (A: 7.95) reflected moderate well-being. Based on these results, it can be inferred that the relationship with colleagues was perceived as a source of well-being by employees.

With regard to items related to supervisory behavior, the items range from intense well-being (access to immediate superior, 8.7) to positive tendency, with having access to one’s immediate superior having the worst rating, with an average of 5.73. Supervisor’s willingness to help was rated slightly below colleagues’ willingness to help

(7.85). Dialogue as a characteristic of supervisory behavior and communication with supervisors approached average results, with a positive tendency, and was perceived by respondents as 6.20 and 6.43, respectively.

In turn, the Recognition and Professional Growth factor contains two items directly related to supervision, which are “I am encouraged by my boss” and “There is a lack of my supervisor’s support for development”. The former was perceived by the respondents as borderline to positive tendency, with a rating of 6.08. However, the latter, supervisor’s support, received an average of 5.87.

Corroborating the hypothesis that interpersonal relationships are crucial to employees’ perception of QWL, in the four open-ended questions that compose the qualitative part of the QWL_AI, the central themes concerning interpersonal relationships at work are identified in the employees’ answers. Both for QWL definition and for well-being sources, the reference to colleagues is noted in the answers. In contrast, relationship with supervisor is seen as a source of ill-being and was also indicated as a complaint in the Comments and Suggestions section.

Focusing on the QWL definition, the results indicate that the themes Recognition, Professional Growth and Good Relations with Colleagues accounted for 21% of the responses. This was the third most significant central theme, preceded by Participatory Management (26%) and Equal Treatment and Benefit Policies (30%). Examples of typical responses concerning good relations with colleagues are: “To work in a pleasant environment where people interact for the same purpose; be recognized and have the chance to grow” and “Be part of a healthy environment...with dignified and respectful treatment among colleagues.”

For the second open-ended question, the results for the sources of well-being in relation to interpersonal relationships brings Harmonious Relationship among Peers as the most characteristic response, with 25% of the responses. Harmonious and Cordial Interpersonal Relations was the fourth central theme noted in the responses, with 13% of workers’ responses. Together, the two central themes accounted for over one-third of what the workers of the referred agency pointed out as a source of well-being. Some examples of responses that show employees’ perception of sources of well-being include: “Good relationship with coworkers”, “Friendly environment without losing focus” and “Pressure-free environment, without conflicts, close and comprehensive supervisors”.

The third open-ended question investigated what workers perceive as sources of ill-being at work. The central theme Lack of Meritocracy in the Distribution of Positions and Lack of Managerial Preparation accounted for 18% of workers’ responses, being the third most significant central theme, with the same percentage as Precarious Working Conditions and Devaluation. The most representative central theme had 26% of the responses and referred to work overload.

Still in relation to the third question, it is noteworthy to quote some responses: “The feeling of the need to coexist with colleagues who, since they hold management positions, confused leadership positions with the right to impose their will on other employees” and “The disputes and all the games played to hold on to commissioned positions; the unequal treatment that is given to people who are close to supervisors, as the quote ‘For my friends, everything. For my enemies, the law’ is usually noted.”

With respect to the fourth and last QWL_AI question, Comments and Suggestions, relationship with supervisor is once more among the central themes in the responses of workers. Present in 25% of the responses, Lack of Managerial Preparation appears as the first complaint in the results and as the second most significant central theme. Thus, for a quarter of the workers, relationship with management is the most important complaint. The first theme referred to Complaints and General Suggestions and was present in 44% of the responses.

Two answers precisely clarify the relevance of this category and greatly illustrate the importance of interpersonal relationships. The first, “It is very important that the administration observe the behavior of their supervisors and assess the need for replacement, as there are supervisors who are turning the workplace into a living hell” highlights the weight of the relationship with supervisors, which may negatively affect QWL markedly. The second shows the impact that the relationship with a supervisor has not only on the employee, but also on a group of employees: “Many colleagues inhibit their potential in detriment to the treatment given by their immediate supervisors.”

DISCUSSION

Interpersonal relationships at work deserve more special attention than what they traditionally receive from researchers. Relationships with colleagues and supervisors have the power to transform the workplace into “heaven” or “hell” as perceived by employees. The two facets of interpersonal relationships (colleagues and

supervisors) are sources and catalysts of well-being and ill-being experiences in the workplace. Therefore, the gap regarding its contribution to QWL needs to be filled.

The aim of this study was to contribute to mitigating the shortage of research on interpersonal relationship at work and QWL. The overall hypothesis was confirmed and one can see that, in fact, these relationships play a central role in the context of production of goods and services, for good and for bad.

In order to have this discussion started, it is necessary to revisit the relevance of studying interpersonal relationships at work. In other words, assuming that work is increasingly performed in teams and that the role of the supervisor is intrinsic to professional practice, why should one devote effort and attention to better understand interpersonal relationships? The answer to this question lies in the analysis of three factors.

The first factor comes from the social support provided by peer relationships and how this can be a source of well-being at work. Quantitative results reveal that the relationship with colleagues indicate positive perceptions in most cases, with averages ranging from 7.64 to 8.76. Employees' perceptions of indicators related to colleagues was homogeneously positive.

Still in relation to colleagues, the qualitative analysis identified answers regarding the relationship with peers under a positive perspective, highlighting the social support role that they exert in the workplace context. Leavitt (1974) states that groups make the organizational environment bearable, livable. According to the core of this assertion, the answers that had the relationship with colleagues as their object denoted such a highlighted position that they were central in the definition of QWL.

Both for the definition of QWL and for sources of well-being, the reference to colleagues appears as the central theme of the responses. Answers like "To work in a pleasant environment where people interact for the same purpose; be recognized and have the chance to grow" and "Be part of a healthy environment...with dignified and respectful treatment among colleagues" concretely illustrate the relevance of these relationships.

The second open-ended question, investigating sources of well-being, had colleagues as a central theme, representing 38% of the total employees' responses. The central theme Harmonious Relations with Peers was the most frequent in the answers and the central theme, Harmonic and Cordial Interpersonal Relations, was the fourth most frequent.

The second factor refers to the relationship with supervisors and the weight they can add to (or remove from) the performance of professional activities. The relationship with supervisors, in turn, was perceived in a different way from the relationship with colleagues, approaching the polarization reported in the literature. The average of quantitative indicators ranged from 5.73 (access to supervisors) to 8.7 (access to immediate supervisors), with an average rating of 6.69. There were seven items related to supervision in the QWL_AI. Results indicated that most of them (five items) had average ratings ranging from 5.73 to 6.43 (communication with supervisors).

From the results presented, it can be concluded that the perception of the relationship with supervisors is less favorable than the perception of the relationship with colleagues, centered on a median axis. Two indicators were assessed with more positive results, namely: "access to immediate superior" and "supervisors' willingness to help". Although positively assessed, supervisors' willingness to help is still less favorably perceived than colleagues' willingness to help.

The qualitative analysis of the open-ended questions, in general, showed a predominance of negative responses regarding supervisors. When reflecting positive aspects, the answers indicated the desire of the occurrence and non-occurrence of concrete actions such as: "supervisor should be closer and more understanding".

Relationship with supervisor was perceived as a potential source of ill-being at work. This may indicate that supervision was not properly exercised. In the questions dedicated to investigate employees' perception of sources of ill-being at work, supervisors accounted for about 1/5 of employees' responses, with the central theme Lack of Meritocracy in the Distribution of Positions and Lack of Managerial Preparation. The title of the central theme itself indicates a failure in the performance of the manager role. The content of the average responses highlighted undue favoritism and imposition of wills, reinforcing this perception of unpreparedness.

Besides being indicated as a source of ill-being, the relationship with the supervisor was also indicated as a complaint in the Comments and Suggestions section. It can be inferred from the results that the way a supervisor

performs management functions greatly affects the staff of an organization. Therefore, appropriately training managers for the performance of their duties can directly affect the QWL of subordinate employees.

In response to the fourth open-ended question, Comments and Suggestions, a quarter of the employees pointed out the relationship with supervisors as a more consistent source of complaint, with Lack of Managerial Preparation corresponding to 25% of the responses. As in other QWL_AI questions, the relationship with the supervisor was perceived as a source of ill-being.

Moreover, Hogan and Kaiser (2005) claim that leaders play a key role in the success of the organization and that they are critical to the organization's success; in addition, when organizations thrive, the physical and psychological well-being of workers and citizens is improved. Therefore, identifying supervisors that cause ill-being in employees and adjusting their behavior can be a decisive strategy for the success of an organization. The consequences of the inappropriate behavior of these managers can be more serious than what is supposed.

The third factor, of a more epistemological nature, leads to questions about what guides the conception of what we think about work and how it is structured. Feuer (1989) points out that the way to understand QWL changes according to the nature of perceived organizational problems. Thus, it is appropriate to infer that, perhaps, the way we think about QWL and perceive what an organizational problem is and what is not leads us to more individualistic than sociocentric concerns, and to value more bureaucratic work organizations than those that focus on understanding and supporting members of organizations. Thus, interpersonal relations would be considered a background problem.

Supporting this hypothesis, Leavitt (1974) states that the design of an organization from scratch around groups appears to violate values of individualism, despite the fact that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. The way work is currently organized has changed. Growing interest in the employees' well-being in a broad sense seems to indicate that individualistic assumptions should guide the context of work less and less. Nevertheless, the focus on the study and development of people in organizations still remains in the single figures, reflecting the hegemonic organizational culture that needs to be rethought.

For Ahmad (2013), the main idea that should be nurtured in the study of people in the context of work is that they must be developed, not just used. Work has a central role in people's lives and should not subject them to stressful and harmful conditions or negatively affect their well-being. Work gives respect and humanity to people. Work should be designed not to harm, but to enhance someone's abilities to perform their role as a worker as well as all the other roles doled out by life.

The study of interpersonal relationships opens up new opportunities. Often, few studies are interested in the relationships in the work environment and the experiences of satisfaction (well-being) that they provide. Moreover, the few existing studies indicate that the relationship with colleagues can contribute more to employees' well-being than to the relationship with supervisors (Erdogan, Bauer, Truxillo, & Mansfield, 2012). Thus, this interest can affect both organizational practices and the QWL field of study.

In the 1930s and 1940s, organizations were person-centered. Individual values were encouraged and this self-centered quest reflected the cultural context of that time. Future prospects can guide research interests and the development of more sociocentric practices, valuing today's basic unit, the group, in the richness of horizontal relationships and the potential to foster the well-being that they possess.

A limitation to the present work is the fact that it was carried out in only one organization. Comparative studies in different organizations can better clarify the role of this relationship and suggest ways to effectively deal with it. In addition, another protagonist marking interpersonal relationships — client, user, consumers — was not subject to this analysis. Those elements would provide a fuller picture of the complexity that marks social relations in organizational contexts.

This cross-sectional study also features another limitation. Longitudinal studies could detect any seasonality in interpersonal relationships. In addition, such studies can contribute by clarifying if certain periods or events can markedly affect the perception of employees on the topic at hand.

It is known that interpersonal relationships are not a discovery of researchers or consultants. They exist independent of any research or organizational action. To better understand how they work and the effect they have may allow the promotion of a better quality of work life and combine better organizational results with well-being experiences that can ultimately promote the sustainability of employees' actions since they will certainly get sick less often and produce more, feeling well in the workplace.

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