

Meaning and Significance of work: a review of articles published in journals associated with the Scientific Periodicals Electronic Library

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Abstract

Working conceptions result from an historical creation process in which development and diffusion are concomitant with the evolution of modes and relations of production, the organization of society as a whole and the forms of human knowledge. In this sense, considering changes associated with work throughout history, this article aims to examine how current studies by Brazilian researchers focus on the meaning and significance of work, through the analysis of articles related to these topics in major administration journals in Brazil. The articles were selected by their focus on work as a subject, and being published in journals associated with the Scientific Electronic Library Periodicals (SPELL). Fifteen articles were identified on this topic in the period 2008 to 2015, which were then analyzed based on content analysis. The results suggest that work continues to be a relevant study topic, since it is one of the fundamental values of the human being and still plays an important role in self-actualization and subjectivity as well as contributing to the development of identity.

Keywords: Work. Significance of Labor. Meaning of Labor. Subjectivity and work

Sentido e significado do trabalho: uma análise dos artigos publicados em periódicos associados à Scientific Periodicals Electronic Library

Resumo

As concepções de trabalho resultam de um processo de criação histórica, no qual seu desenvolvimento e propagação são concomitantes à evolução dos modos e relações de produção, da organização da sociedade como um todo e das formas de conhecimento humano. Nesse sentido, considerando as mudanças associadas ao trabalho ao longo da história, este artigo tem por objetivo analisar como estudos atuais de pesquisadores brasileiros enfocam os temas *sentido e significado do trabalho*, por meio da análise de artigos relacionados aos temas em periódicos da área de Administração do país. Foram selecionados 15 artigos que abordam o tema *trabalho*, publicados em periódicos associados à base Scientific Periodicals Electronic Library (SPELL), no período de 2008 a 2015. Esses estudos foram submetidos ao método da análise de conteúdo. Os resultados sugerem que o trabalho continua sendo um tema relevante de investigação, dado que constitui um dos valores fundamentais do ser humano e que ainda exerce importante papel com vistas à sua autorrealização e sua subjetividade, bem como contribui para o desenvolvimento de sua identidade.

Palavras-chave: Trabalho. Sentidos do trabalho. Significado do trabalho. Subjetividade e trabalho.

Sentido y significado del trabajo: una revisión de artículos publicados en revistas asociadas a la Scientific Periodicals Electronic Library

Resumen

Las concepciones del trabajo son resultado de un proceso de creación histórico, en que su desarrollo y propagación son concomitantes con la evolución de los modos y relaciones de producción, de la organización de la sociedad en su conjunto y de las formas de conocimiento humano. En este sentido, teniendo en cuenta los cambios asociados con el trabajo a lo largo de la historia, el presente ensayo tiene como objetivo examinar cómo los estudios actuales de investigadores brasileños se centran en los temas *sentido y significado del trabajo*, por medio del análisis de artículos relacionados con dichos temas en las principales revistas de Administración del país. Se seleccionaron 15 artículos que abordaron el tema *trabajo*, publicados en revistas asociadas a la base *Scientific Periodicals Electronic Library* (SPELL), en el período de 2008 a 2015. Esos artículos fueron sometidos al método de análisis de contenido. Los resultados sugieren que el trabajo sigue siendo un tema relevante de investigación, dado que constituye uno de los valores fundamentales del ser humano y que aún desempeña un papel importante en su autorrealización y su subjetividad, así como contribuye al desarrollo de su identidad.

Palabras clave: Trabajo. Sentidos del trabajo. Significado del trabajo. Subjetividad y trabajo.

Article submitted on February 12, 2016 and accepted for publication on November 14, 2017.

[Translated version] Note: All quotes in English translated by this article's translator.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1679-395159388>

INTRODUCTION

It was over the course of the 20th Century that work first took on the configuration it assumes today. New forms of organizing work emerged during this time that modified its very nature. One can see permanent and long-lasting jobs gradually disappear, and at the same time, new technologies and innovative ways of organizing work emerge, accompanied by new working methods (MORIN, 2001).

These new work concepts are, therefore, the result of a process of historical creation in which the development and the propagation of each one is concomitant with the evolution of the methods and relations of production, the organization of society as a whole, and the different forms of human understanding. Hence, the creation of each particular work concept is associated with economic, ideological and political interests (BORGES, 1999). In this sense, and if one considers the changes associated with work that have taken place over the course of history, their importance in shaping the subjectivity and identity of individuals, their influence on the construction of societies, and their importance to Administration studies in general, and people management more specifically, then this article means to answer the following question: How do Administration studies today deal with the meaning and significance of work in Brazil?

In order to be able to answer this question, an analysis was carried out of the way in which current studies by Brazilian researchers in Administration approach the *meaning* and *significance of work*, using as the basis of this analysis, articles dealing with the subject of *work* in journals specializing in this area in Brazil.

To this end, the analysis of this work focused on articles in which the subject of work was the main topic of discussion, published between 2008 and 2015 in journals associated with the Scientific Periodicals Electronic Library (SPELL). SPELL is an electronic database containing the scientific output of the fields of Administration, Accounting and Tourism.

The present article is divided into four sections, in addition to this introduction: the second section outlines the theoretical matrix in order to provide the study with the pertinent support and fundamentals; the third section looks at the chosen methodology, outlining the kind of research and the analysis tools applied to the data obtained; the fourth section sets out the results; and the fifth section analyses these results and offers some final considerations.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Human labour is the subject of study in a wide variety of fields of science, including Anthropology, History, Economics, Sociology, Psychology and Philosophy, and is often confused with the history of humankind itself (BENDASSOLLI, 2007). This article has no intention of delving into the multiplicity of concepts already produced by these extensive contributions, especially as this would be an impossible task. Instead, what interests us here are those contributions that can help us better understand current concepts in Brazilian studies on the subject of work. Therefore, the article only deals with those theoretical categories with which it means to establish a dialogue, and those that can help us achieve a better understanding of the object of this study.

Thus, this section sets out certain definitions and concepts regarding work, looking at the relationship between man and work and the role of work in the development of individual identity. It then moves on to discuss the meaning and significance of work as seen by different authors.

Definitions and Concepts of Work

Human work is a complex, multifaceted and polysemic activity that not only allows, but indeed demands different points of view if it is to be understood. Coutinho (2009), for example, states that when we talk about work we are in fact referring to a human activity, whether individual or collective, that has a social, complex, dynamic and mutant quality, and that differs from any other kind of animal activity thanks to its reflexive, conscious, purposeful, strategic, instrumental and moral nature.

For Marx (1983), it is this very capacity that humankind has to transmit meaning to nature through an activity that is planned, conscious and that involves a dual transformation between humankind and nature that differentiates the work of humans from that of any other animal. For this author, it is through work that humans transform themselves and nature, and, in transforming it according to their needs, they imprint their own humanity on everything around them. Sachuk and Araújo

(2007) stress the central nature of work to humanity when they state that, over the whole course of humankind's historical evolution, work has been a determinant in maintaining man's existence, both individually and collectively. For these authors, humanity is, both historically and politically, almost entirely structured around the concept of work. Thus, attempting to separate work from peoples' very existence is extremely difficult, if not impossible, in view of the importance and the impact that work has on them (JACQUES, 1996).

Nevertheless, Blanch (2003) points out that, contrary to the view that considers work to be a source of satisfaction and self-realization, as something fundamental in developing the subject and his/her mission in life, there are other approaches that attribute negative connotations to work. According to this author, this negative pole is related, in most cases, to the representation of work as being a curse, a punishment, a yoke, a stigma, a form of coercion, an effort and a penalty and as no more than an instrumental function in the service of material survival, to which one should dedicate all one's attention to achieve this goal.

In this sense, for Marx (1983), work, in the sense of capitalist production, ceases to humanize and begins to alienate, since the product and the process itself of production become strange to the worker. Capitalism changes a man's sense of freedom to the extent that it needs to sell his work efforts to ensure his survival, disassociating the work from the man doing it. The worker who is subordinated to capital no longer has control over the product or the process of his work, since these are now centralized in the hands of the capitalist.

Thus, in a capitalist system, work is seen as a way for a part of society to simply survive, and another part to accumulate assets. This new dynamic uses ideology to maintain itself, and it assumes the role of mediator in sustaining and promoting the current economic system. Today, in the current globalized and capitalist world, the predominant ideology is a liberal one, and work is, in a general sense, seen from this specific perspective (OVEJERO, 2010a).

In this context, and in line with neoliberal ideology, individualist ethics and competitiveness are intensified in the world of work. Workers who are submitted to the constant threat of dismissal and the insecurity of maintaining their jobs compete between themselves to "guarantee" that they hold on to these jobs. Thus, the desire to achieve and to succeed become an "obsession", demanding of workers an extra dedication that has no bounds, and indeed, that goes well beyond the confines of the organizations that employ them (ANTUNES, 2000).

The neoliberal ideology that modern-day society propagates has led to psychosocial insecurity, which adds to the fear of losing one's job, increases stress and corrodes character (OVEJERO, 2010). Furthermore, these same sentiments ultimately weaken social relations within other institutions, such as the family, impairing the creation of a self-esteem that is held in balance by a sense of independence and security, as was offered by relative job stability in the past. This is perhaps why increasing numbers of workers are prone to stress and to psychosocial risks in the workplace, weighed down as they are by the risks of unemployment, even when employed (SENNETT, 2009).

The Contemporary Meaning and Significance of Work

The word "work" is understood as a professional activity, paid for or not, that is productive or creative and that is carried out with a specific aim in mind. Although definitions found in dictionaries may be derived from the idea of work as being the fruit of historical events, they are intrinsically associated with the ideological discourse of their times. In order to better illustrate this ideological nature, Bock (2006, p. 20) suggests that:

[...] If we were to open, for example, a dictionary from ancient Greece, we might very well find work to be defined as [...] an exclusively physical activity, reduced to the effort that people need to employ to ensure their livelihood, satisfy their vital needs [...] which was not socially valued.

Based on these ideas, one might view the meaning of work as being rooted in historicity, that is, aligned with the era, with the culture, with the way of relating to and understanding the world of each subject and group to which he or she belonged and belongs (SACHUK and ARAÚJO, 2007).

In more recent times, much has been said and published about the acceleration and diversity of changes taking place in the world of work, especially in relation to and/or resulting from the introduction of new production technologies, such as computerization, automation, new management models and new potential for improved productivity. Much has been debated about the scope of these transformations in terms of there being a marked shift in how we perceive work, suggesting the emergence of a new paradigm that redefines the place of work within the social life of each individual (OVEJERO, 2010a).

These changes in the forms of work and employment have objective and subjective implications, given that the notion of work involves both the socioeconomic conditions in which such human endeavour is carried out and the significance, which involves the meaning and the sociocultural values of this experience. Work conditions are relative to the circumstances in which the work is carried out, whilst the significance refers to different values and concepts of work (COUTINHO, 2009).

Many authors in the field of work studies, including researchers working for the Meaning of Work International Research Team (MOW, 1987), Lemos, Cavazotte and Souza (2015), Bispo, Dourado and Amorim (2013) and Sawitzki, Lorenzetti, Griza et al. (2012) consider “meaning” and “significance” to be similar terms. Tolfo and Piccinini (2007, p. 40) refer to the etymology of the word “meaning” to explain the use of both terms as synonyms:

Etymologically speaking, the word ‘meaning’ [‘sentido’ in Portuguese] comes from the Latin word *sensus*, which refers to perception, significance, sentiment, or to the verb *sentire*: to perceive, to sense and to know (...HARPER, 2001). One can see that it can be adopted as a synonym to significance, and that its origin refers, above all, to the occurrence of basic psychological processes.

Although they suggest that the terms ‘significance’ and ‘meaning’ can be considered synonymous, Tolfo and Piccinini (2007, p. 40) do differentiate between them, defining the first as the “social representation a completed task has for a worker”, which one can translate as being the recognition that the worker receives for his efforts in achieving desired goals, his sense of belonging to a group or the importance his work has to society as a whole. In the case of the second, the authors understand ‘meaning’ as being the value that work offers the individual on a personal level, in other words, in terms of satisfaction and self-achievement.

One should point out that for the purposes of the analysis carried out in this present article, the terms *meaning* and *significance* are considered synonymous.

One of the most important studies on the meanings attributed to work was carried out by the MOW group, between 1981 and 1983, in eight different countries. The MOW’s investigative team carried out a number of research projects aimed at obtaining empirical data on the significance and meaning of work. The group’s researchers combined the data under three main headings: i) the centrality of work, ii) the social norms relating to work and iii) the results of work most valued/work goals. The centrality of work is understood as the level of importance that work holds in people’s lives, measuring how central work is to a subject’s self-image. The social norms relating to work, meanwhile, work like social models that show the rewards obtained through work, instilling in workers a perception that what they receive is fair in relation to the contribution they make. Finally, the results of work most valued are the values that relate to the reasons that lead someone to start work, such as, for example, to obtain prestige and financial reward, to keep busy, to have social contact and inter-personal relations, to feel useful to society etc. (MOW, 1987).

Morin (2007) defines the meaning of work as an affective structure made up of 3 components: i) significance, ii) orientation and iii) coherence. Significance refers to the representations a subject has of his activity, as well as the value he attributes to it. Orientation is his inclination to work, what he is seeking and what effectively guides his actions, and coherence is the harmony or balance he expects from his relationship with his work.

Antunes (2000) links the meaning of work to the meaning of life, stating that a life void of meaning in work is incompatible with a life full of meaning outside of work. Thus, in order to have a life full of meaning, the individual must have a sense of fulfilment in his work. For this author, if work is self-determined, autonomous and free, then it will have meaning by allowing an individual to determine how he uses his free time, which is essential for him to be able to humanize and emancipate in their most profound sense. The search for a life full of meaning through work allows one to explore the decisive links that exist between work and freedom (ANTUNES, 2000).

Ovejero (2010b) talks about how the incessant search for profit by neoliberal capitalism, as well as productive globalization or the logic of a goods producing system, have gradually eroded all social ties and diluted policies that ensured the working classes minimum conditions of survival, thereby creating an immense society of the excluded and those living in precarious circumstances. This view can also be clearly observed in the works of Dejours (1999), where he states that in present-day society, the individual that loses his job goes through a process of progressive desocialization and sees the foundations of his identity severely damaged, while those who hold on to their jobs suffer from a fear of losing those jobs and of joining the “excluded”. Thus, in both cases, workers have to endure a degree of suffering, either because they are without a job, and, consequently, without access to the basic conditions needed to support themselves and their families, or because they are in constant fear of losing their jobs and being forced to experience such adversity.

Sennett (2009) also contributes to this discussion in raising the issue of career. The author points out that in the English language, *career* was the term used to describe a road used by horse-drawn carriages but which, at the beginning of the 20th Century began to refer instead to the linear and progressive “road” workers have to take in their jobs. At a time that was characterized by job stability, life made sense to workers, to the extent that they felt they were the authors of their own destinies, thanks to what they could achieve from the fruits of their labour. Even those emerging from more disadvantaged levels of society had a sense of self-respect, thanks to the opportunity they were afforded by their employment to enjoy upward mobility in their lives and in their children’s lives (SENNETT, 2009).

However, with the spread of flexible capitalism and neoliberal ideals, this view of a straight and clear career path soon became “blocked” and all responsibility for maintaining themselves or obtaining work was transferred to workers. Because they no longer had a clear and guaranteed career path mapped out for their future, and because they had no idea as to which path to take, workers soon experienced a sense of loss of control of their own lives, leading to severe anxiety in relation to their futures and those of their families (SENNETT, 2009).

In this sense, Gaulejac (2007) lay the blame on new corporate management methods for this scenario of labour-related suffering and social injustice. According to this author, in modern-day society financial logic alone makes sense and any significant elements related to work are demoted in favour of economic and managerial needs. Thus, a social scenario is established where society is placed at the service of the economy, thereby concealing this progressive loss of the meaning of work and leading to contradictions, antagonisms and uncertainties. Consequently, the act of working is lost within a complex, abstract and deterritorialized system, which no longer allows workers to properly circumscribe the fruits of their labours (GAULEJAC, 2007).

Even though faced with this scenario of social problems caused by the neoliberal and managerial policies adopted by organizations today, primarily for the purposes of self-reproducing capital, as Dejours (1999) points out, there is a serious lack of social and political mobilization on the part of society to put an end to the injustices caused by this kind of model. The author notes that individuals show no apparent resentment and make no effort to mobilize to try to improve workplace and job conditions, and indeed they appear to see the problems associated with these as natural adversities. Individuals are thus “ensnared” by the economicist cause preached by the liberal system. They begin to absorb values favoured by this system as if they were perfectly natural, values such as, for example, competitiveness and resilience.

Standing (2013) states that today, it isn’t only outsourced workers, those with low levels of education, temporary labour and those working outside the formal labour market that suffer unstable labour conditions as a result of neoliberal capitalism. One consequence of such neoliberal policies has been the creation of a new class of worker, which the author refers to as the *precarariat*, made up of individuals with a high level of education who are exposed to flexible and unstable working conditions, but who do not have any direct ties of identity with those who worked under precarious conditions in the past. The difficulty in trying to establish such ties between classes subjected to precarious labour conditions ends up preventing any kind of joint mobilization in favour of workers’s rights.

In this sense, managerialist ideology and culture end up generating a new social moral, mobilizing the psyche of individuals in favour of the utilitarian, managerialist and economic goals of production (GAULEJAC, 2007). It is in this sense that the divide between adversity and injustice works as a defence mechanism against the painful conscience of complicity, collaboration, and responsibility for the worsening of the conditions experienced by workers in our society, generating a certain trivialization of social injustice (DEJOURS, 1999).

Thus, the meaning of work is placed in suspension, when the very act of work is assessed using criteria that make no sense to the individual, who, in turn, needs to value that which he produces, establish coherence in the face of chaos, regulation in the face of disorder, rationality in the face of contradiction and creativity in the face of uniformity in order to do his work (GAULEJAC, 2007).

However, in the managerialist universe, subjectivity is mobilized in favour of objectives, results and the criteria of success that tend to exclude all that is not useful or profitable. Economic value tends to impose itself on all other considerations. The meaning of the act of work is thus considered a mere function of that which it supplies within a commercial logic (GAULEJAC, 2007).

METHOD

This study sought to identify trends and possible patterns in scientific literature dealing with the subject of work. The main data source of the research carried out was SPELL, an electronic database that, at the time of our research, specialized in the scientific output of the fields of Administration, Accounting and Tourism. The period covered by the research ran from January 2008 to March 2015.

Our research of this particular database produced 120 articles with the word “work” included in among their keywords. This research was later refined by identifying specific categories: significance of work; meaning of work; centrality of work; identity of work; work relations and the transformations that have occurred in the world of work. The terms used in this research were selected on the basis of a theoretical revision developed especially for this study.

Based on this search, 15 articles were chosen in all from editions of the following periodicals: *Revista de Ciências da Administração*, *Revista Eletrônica de Ciência Administrativa (RECADM)*, *Revista Gestão & Tecnologia*, *Revista Gestão e Planejamento*, *Cadernos EBAPE.BR*, *Revista Brasileira de Gestão e Negócios (FECAP)*, *Revista de Administração (RAUSP)*, *Revista de Administração Mackenzie (RAM)*, *Revista Gestão Organizacional (RGO)*, *Revista Gestão e Sociedade*, *Revista de Administração de Empresas (RAE)*, *Revista de Administração Pública e Gestão Social*, *Revista Gestão e Regionalidade*, *Revista Alcance* e *Revista do Mestrado em Administração e Desenvolvimento Empresarial (ADM.MADE)*.

Guidelines suggested by Bardin (2004) were used to analyse content, defined as a set of communications analysis techniques. One should stress here that in the case of this particular article, we did not use all the steps of the content analysis method, concentrating instead on applying the technique described by BARDIN (2004) as *thematic analysis* or *categorical analysis*. This technique involves the decomposition of texts into units and then their classification using regrouping. This method has three stages: i) initial analysis, which includes organizing the material, operationalization, and systematization, choosing documents, formulation of hypotheses, objectives and preparation of indicators and floating reading; ii) exploratory analysis, which consists of codifications and classifications; and iii) treatment of the results obtained and their interpretation, which consist of the tabulation and application of descriptive analysis techniques.

RESULTS AND ANALYSES

The aim of this section is to outline the main findings relating to the meaning and significance of work as observed in the articles researched, in accordance with the proposed theoretical reference framework. Following the analysis of the 15 articles found in the SPELL database, it was noted that the subjects most discussed by the researchers of these articles involved the meaning and significance of work: the meaning and subjectivity of the work theme; the meaning of work and the identification of individuals with their occupations and the question of centrality in work. Therefore, the items below were further developed in accordance with the main findings on the subject of work from the 15 articles chosen.

The Significance and Meaning of Work

The following articles were identified as dealing with the significance and meaning of work: “*O novo sentido do trabalho para o sujeito pós-moderno: uma abordagem crítica*” – Rohm and Lopes (2015); “*A dinâmica do significado do trabalho na iminência de uma privatização*” – Palassi and Silva (2014); “*Sentidos do trabalho e racionalidades instrumental e substantiva: interfaces entre a administração e a psicologia*” – Andrade, Tolfo and Dellagnelo (2012); “*Prazer e sofrimento: um estudo de caso em um centro de pesquisas brasileiro*”, by Falce, Garcia and Muylder (2011); “*Para além do tempo de emprego: o sentido do trabalho no processo de aposentadoria*” – Bitencourt, Gallon, Batista et al. (2011); “*Novas gerações no mercado de trabalho: expectativas renovadas ou antigos ideais?*” – Cavazotte, Lemos and Viana (2012); and, finally, “*Mudanças no mundo do trabalho e cidadania na sociedade contemporânea: análise dos discursos de trabalhadores no sul de Minas Gerais*” – Pereira, Muniz and Brito (2009).

In a study carried out in 2009, aimed at better understanding the meaning of work and how it relates to the sense of citizenship of workers in the industrial sector, in the south of Minas Gerais state, Pereira, Muniz and Brito (2009) observed that work is perceived by individuals according to the interaction that exists between them and the interpretation resulting from changes that occurred over the years in the world of work. According to these authors, such changes have defined new production practices, and offered scope for precarious work conditions, worsening labour relations and increased unemployment.

Bitencourt, Gallon, Batista et al. (2011), in their work that analyses the meaning of work for those who have already retired, concluded that such meaning is very broadbased and diverse for this group of individuals. It can manifest itself in a number of ways, which can depend on the organization worked for, colleagues, relationships created, family, stage in life, financial factors and other aspects. Thus, the centrality of work is something that differs, firstly, in accordance with the stage in the life of each worker, and then in its relationship with the meaning the person attributes to his work.

Andrade, Tolfo and Dellagnelo (2012) seek to identify similarities between the traces that characterize the meanings attributed to work and instrumental and substantive rationalities. Falce, Garcia and Muylder (2011), meanwhile, attempt to describe and analyse the pleasure and the suffering experienced by researchers working at a research centre in Minas Gerais state. Bitencourt, Gallon, Batista et al. (2011) try to analyse what the meaning of work represents to retirees. Cavazotte, Lemos and Viana (2012) on the other hand, carried out a survey aimed at understanding the expectations of young professionals about to enter the labour market, in terms of their insertion into organizations and focusing on the tangible and intangible rewards obtained from their work. Finally, Pereira, Muniz and Brito (2009) studied the meaning of work and its relationship with the exercising of citizenship as perceived by workers.

Andrade, Tolfo and Dellagnelo (2012) pointed out that there has been a marked increase in the production of research into the phenomena of the significance and the meaning of work, especially since 1970. These authors suggest that:

[...] there are divergencies in relation to the phenomena of the significances and meanings of work due to the conceptual imprecision of the meanings and significances constructs, and because we are dealing here with multifaceted phenomena made up of different personal and social variables, analysed by authors with different theoretical perspectives. Thus, by further developing the study of these phenomena, in interface with other fields, one can contribute to the improvement of studies on the subject (ANDRADE, TOLFO and DELLAGNELO, 2012, p. 206).

Along similar lines, Falce, Garcia and Muylder (2011) understand that work as an activity has, today, become more important in terms of its significance to people and society. The context of this activity is no longer one of a mere occupation but rather the ultimate activity in the lives of workers.

Andrade, Tolfo and Dellagnelo (2012, p. 210) stress that:

Although the focus of studies on the meanings of work generally involve professional categories, in other words, without contextualizing a specific organizational environment, one can infer that there is an overlap between the meanings attributed to work and rationality. This occurs because they are carried out in a particular society and in organizations in which the characteristics of rationality tend to predominate. One should point out that today we are living in a capitalist society, in which the relationship between the means and the ends and the utilitarian calculation of the consequences are highly valued.

Cavazotte, Lemos and Viana (2012) look at the expectations of young professionals in training with regard to the rewards they expect to reap from their future work. It uses interviews with students taking undergraduate courses in Administration at private universities in Rio de Janeiro. The authors conclude that:

[...] the implications of the meaning of work to organizations and societies are considerable, since it determines what people believe to be legitimate in the occupational context, what they are prepared to tolerate or not, the funds that the elites are prepared to invest in the different activities of the labour market and even the level of ease with which individuals are prepared to change their habits to satisfy the demands of new technologies. Therefore, understanding the meaning of work to individuals and groups today is an essential step to understanding the behaviour of people at work in a post-modern world, in which the professional dimension still has a fundamental role in shaping the identity and ensuring the well-being of people (CAVAZOTTE, LEMOS and VIANA, 2012, p. 165).

The purpose of this article is to analyse the ways in which managerial society develops a representation of the world and of the human being itself. For Rohm and Lopes (2015, p. 333):

[...] work is a fundamental element of human existence. Through it, man communes with nature, shapes his own reality, gives himself meaning, inserts himself into group contexts, takes on roles and ultimately

promotes the perennality of his existence. In helping individuals to relate to the environment, in a given context, work expresses itself as an endless source for constructing subjectivity, producing the significance of existence and the meaning of life. However, work in post-modernity occupies room in the desires of the individual to such an extent that people seek the meaning of their lives in this role alone, thereby preventing humans from achieving total self-realization.

The research done by Palassi and Silva (2014) during the process to privatize a municipal sanitation company, at the end of the 1990s, was aimed at analysing the significance and meaning of work to workers linked to a company on the verge of being privatized. The authors based their analysis on the inter-related dimensions of the construction of the significance of work as proposed by the MOW group. They concluded that the imminence of privatization leads to a fragmentation in the meaning of work, and later, a change in its significance, all part of a reaction to the imminent process.

The Meaning and Subjectivity of Work

The following articles were chosen for dealing with the subject of the subjectivity of work: *“O sentido do trabalho para pessoas com deficiência”* – Lima, Tavares, Brito et al. (2013); *“Trabalho e subjetividade: sofrimento psíquico em contexto de mudanças organizacionais”* – Backes (2012); and *“Significado do trabalho nas indústrias criativas”* – Bendassolli and Borges-Andrade (2011).

Bendassolli and Borges-Andrade (2011) analysed the significance of work to professionals who work in creative industries, a type of study that is still somewhat lacking in scientific literature relating to Administration. The authors understood that:

[...] there are, among many, two strong representations on the significance of work and on working in traditional thinking in the West. The influential concept of alienation is a good example of this idea. The worker is alienated when he has no control over his own work, or when the activity he is involved in is disconnected from his experiences, his abilities and his initiatives as a subject. From this perspective, work is a threat to ideas such as freedom, dignity and, especially, to the representation of work as a creative encounter between man and nature from which his very material and psychic existence emerges (BENDASSOLLI and BORGES-ANDRADE, 2011, p. 144).

Backes (2012) sought to understand how an employee experiences, from a subjective point of view, the organizational changes that take place within a large-scale enterprise, especially in terms of his psychic suffering. According to the author:

[...] work, whilst a source of suffering and alienation, can also be, from another point of view, an important means for rescuing a man as a subject, for his reappropriation and emancipation, for his education and for him to practice solidarity and democracy (BACKES, 2012, p. 136).

Lima, Tavares, Brito et al. (2013) analysed the meaning of work for persons with disabilities while Backes (2012) sought to understand how an employee experiences, from a subjective point of view, the organizational changes that take place within a large-scale enterprise, especially in terms of his psychic suffering. Finally, Bendassolli and Borges-Andrade (2011) analysed the meaning of work of professionals working in creative industries.

Lima, Tavares, Brito et al. (2013) suggested that, in order to better understand the meaning of work, one must first understand the subjectivity of the person who is carrying out such a task, in other words, the worker. These authors considered that work as a subjective experience allows for multiple interactions between different subjects under different conditions (men, women, black or white, rich or poor, disabled or not, better or less educated, people with different attitudes to thinking, feeling and working), evoking an interweaving of different elements and ways of producing and working.

Work also offers social interaction, since it is in its very environment, the workplace, that one finds interpersonal exchange between individuals and it is far from being restricted to the carrying out of routine activities alone. The fact that he is placed inside this social environment allows the individual to improve his subjectivity (LIMA, TAVARES, BRITO et al., 2013).

The Meaning of Work and Individuals Identifying with Work and their Occupations

The following articles were identified as dealing with the subject of individuals identifying with their work and their occupations: “*Sobre o sentido do trabalho fora do enclave de mercado*” – Dourado, Holanda, Silva (2009); “*Significado do trabalho nas indústrias criativas*” – Bendassolli and Borges-Andrade (2011); “*Significações psicossociais sobre o sentido do trabalho e a competitividade em modos de produção contemporâneos*” – Cardoso and Carvalho (2009); and “*Sentido do trabalho e diversidade: um estudo com homossexuais masculinos*” – Silva, Bastos, Lima et al. (2013).

In their article, Dourado, Holanda, Silva (2009) investigate the meaning(s) that individuals working in organizations outside the enclave of the market – more specifically, organizations of popular culture – attribute to work. Bendassolli and Borges-Andrade (2011), meanwhile, as mentioned in the previous item, studied the meaning of work for professionals who work in the creative industries. Cardoso and Carvalho (2009) try to understand how human and corporate needs and interests are satisfied, focusing on the creation of psychological identity and the social insertion of individuals, as well as on the operational efficiency and competitiveness of companies. Finally, Silva, Bastos, Lima et al. (2013) analyse the perception of homosexuals in relation to the influence of sexual orientation on developing an identity and on the meaning of work.

Dourado, Holanda, Silva (2009) approach the meaning of work from the perspective of popular culture, uncovering two very distinct views in relation to the meaning attributed to work. The first sees work as something painful, unpleasant and that only offers the individual minimum conditions to fulfil his basic needs. On the other hand, the same survey shows a view of personal fulfilment, when an individual is recognized for having completed a particular task. Such recognition is, in this aspect, linked to other work orders, different to the view normally studied, namely the corporate view. Thus, Dourado, Holanda, Silva (2009) state that work can have another probability, different to that which is usually studied, the corporate, offering us a significance that involves elements that are crucial to the life of the individual, in the social and organizational spheres.

Cardoso e Carvalho (2009) note that, for workers, the meaning of work comes through the effectiveness of the work done by teams of workers and by the adequacy of relations achieved through the model of management applied. The combination of these elements offers individuals the conditions to enable them to create their own psychological identities and to achieve social inclusion.

Bendassolli and Borges-Andrade (2011) state that, in the case of those professionals working in the creative industries, their work has meaning to the extent that it allows them to express themselves, to be heard and to put into practice all their skills and aspirations.

[...] to work in these sectors involves some form of “self-esthetic”, in other words, an affirmation of the individual’s own identity in the form of his works, performances, activities, acting etc. It is often the case that a professional in the creative industries is himself a “brand”. Hence the idea of seeing work as an expression of oneself, of one’s own identity – something that perhaps stands out more in the meaning of work in these sectors than in traditional sectors, where work usually involves activities that are done in the name of an organization or company (BENDASSOLLI and BORGES-ANDRADE, 2011, p. 155).

Silva, Bastos, Lima et al. (2013), who examined the influence of sexual orientation on the construction of meaning and on the identity of work in the case of homosexuals of the male sex, concluded that sexual orientation does not interfere in the context of work. On the contrary, it is seen as something natural and has no impact on the structure of the meaning of work, primarily because companies in general are trying to find ways of promoting sexual diversity.

The Meaning and Centrality of Work in the Life of Individuals

The following articles were identified as dealing with the centrality of work in the life of individuals: “*O significado do trabalho para uma executiva: a dicotomia prazer e sofrimento*” – Lourenço, Ferreira and Brito (2013); “*Significado do trabalho nas indústrias criativas*” – Bendassolli and Borges-Andrade (2011); and “*Dimensões do significado do trabalho e suas relações*” – Kubo, Gouvêa and Mantovani (2013).

Bendassolli and Borges-Andrade (2011) noted a high level of centrality of work in the case of professionals working in the creative industries. The probability here is that the work carried out by these professionals demands a high level of affective commitment. This may be because, as the relationship between the creative professional and his work has an important

vocational component, his commitment is first to himself and not to the organization. In practice, this kind of commitment can also imply a strong dedication to the professional's own career. Therefore, the authors suggest interpreting the high level of centrality of work in the case of these professionals as evidence of a strong affective commitment, primarily aimed at their careers. Furthermore, a high degree of centrality may also suggest a high level of affective involvement in the activity to be carried out.

Lourenço, Ferreira and Brito (2013) sought to understand the meaning of work for an executive, in other words, they investigated the dimensions perceived by her with regard to the professional activity in which she was involved. Kubo, Gouvêa and Mantovani (2013) sought to identify the aspects associated with the meaning of work in people's lives and to determine any relationships between these different dimensions.

Lourenço, Ferreira and Brito (2013), in researching the meaning of work for an executive, confirmed the centrality of work in the life of this individual and showed that the dimension of pleasure is not conditioned to organizational contexts that lie outside the scope of the market alone, such as cultural manifestations, religion, the arts and others. Indeed, one can note that the centrality of work in the life of this executive has a preponderance of the dimension of pleasure, with her showing many positive perceptions in relation to her work, denoting more satisfaction and psychological well-being than suffering.

Kubo, Gouvêa and Mantovani (2013), in attempting to identify the dimensions most associated with the significance of work in the life of people and their relationships, showed that the significance of work is reflected in the centrality of work, goals and much valued results and finally, in social norms. The sample researched showed that work has an important role in attributing significance to the life of the worker. Work is seen as a fundamental component of life as a whole. Furthermore, it was noted that goals and highly valued results (such as learning, autonomy, prestige and promotion) are more important to workers than rights and duties relating to work.

CONCLUSION

This present article analyses the way in which the themes of the meaning and significance of work have been approached by Brazilian researchers in the field of Administration. In comparing the findings of the articles analysed, we observed that the theme of work is multifaceted in literature on the subject, being dealt with and discussed by a variety of different currents of thought and academics, as mentioned in our introduction. This characteristic also reaffirms the different points of view among researchers in terms, primarily, of the concepts of significance, meaning and the role of work.

Some authors have stood out in terms of this subject, being regularly mentioned and quoted in the articles researched: Karl Marx, Ricardo Antunes, Estelle Morin, Pedro Bendassolli, Vincent de Gaulejac and Christophe Dejours. Because they are considered authors who approach the subject with a critical perspective, there is little surprise that the articles researched also analysed the subject from a critical point of view.

In terms of the meaning and significance of work, Bitencourt, Gallon, Batista et al. (2011) show that they can be manifested in a variety of different ways, depending on the organization for which a person works, his colleagues, the relationships he establishes, his family, the stage in his life and financial aspects. The meaning of work can thus be understood as a component of a social constructed and reproduced reality, which interacts with different personal and social variables and influences the actions of people and the nature of society at a given moment in time.

Still on this theme, Dourado, Holanda, Silva (2009) cite two very distinct views in relation to the meaning attributed to work, with on the one hand it being considered as something most disagreeable, and on the other, a fundamental component of self-realization. In terms of the latter view of work, it is worth citing Antunes (2000) who points to a relationship between the meaning of work and the meaning of life, suggesting that a life full of meaning can only be possible if the individual is realized in the sphere of work. Blanch (2003), similarly to Dourado, Holanda, Silva (2009), also believes that there are both negative and positive connotations with respect to work, as discussed in the theoretical reference of this present article.

Dourado, Holanda, Silva (2009), similarly to Gaulejac (2007), draw out attention to the study of other properties of work, other than those routinely studied, in other words, the corporate/managerial. These authors thus reaffirm the ideas put forward by Gaulejac (2007) when they suggest that in the managerial universe, subjectivity is mobilized in relation to goals, results and

the criteria of success, tending to exclude everything that is not considered useful or profitable. In other words, in studies on the subject of work they ignore elements that are fundamental to the individual's life in the social and organizational spheres. Andrade, Tolfo and Dellagnelo (2012) stress that today we live in a capitalist society, one in which the relationship between the means and the ends and the utilitarian calculation of the consequences are highly valued.

According to Hackman and Oldhan (1976), work that has meaning is important, useful and legitimate for the person who does it. These authors looked at how the interactions, the characteristics of a task and individual differences influence motivation, satisfaction and productivity in carrying out this task. Dourado, Holanda, Silva (2009) also share this view, pointing out that personal realization in work is directly linked to the individual being recognized for the work he has done.

For Dejours (2007), work is and will continue to be central to the development of an identity and of health, of personal realization, of relations between men and women, of the evolution of coexistence and of culture. On this subject, Freitas, Nascimento and Neves (2013) understand that the value given to human life within the productive process, greater relationships, the development of "win-win" partnerships between employers and workers and the development of initiatives that allow for the establishment of more stable, loyal and long-lasting labour relations through reduced manipulation of workers' subjectivity, are all important values that should permeate throughout labour relations. These can help solidify the way in which individuals identify with the organizations where they work, without these organizations taking away these individuals' interiority.

The findings of this research suggest that work may be considered as one of the fundamental values of human beings and that it still plays an important role in constituting their self-realization, their subjectivities and their sociability, as well as contributing to the development of their identities, providing income and sustenance, offering the possibility to achieve targets and goals in life and to show their actions, initiatives and abilities. It can, therefore, be considered a founding pillar of human existence, since humans can only exist if they work. Because of its vital role, there is a clear need to develop more in-depth research and studies on the subject of work within the field of Administration.

Two points deserve more in-depth consideration within the subject under study here, but which could not be expanded on within the confines of this article. The first refers to the fact that our research used just the one source of data (SPELL), which, although offering considerable coverage, cannot nevertheless be taken as being fully representative of this field of research. The second limitation of this work lies in the application of the content analysis method, which in the case of this article was limited to providing qualitative aspects of research only, without delving more deeply in the analysis of the discourse contained in the chosen texts. Similarly, the method used does not provide sufficient quantitative data to statistically map the publications and characteristics of studies on the subject of work in the field of Administration.

We have sought here to make a contribution to the field of study into work as a subject within the area of Administration. The hope is that the theoretical elements and the data we have provided may serve as an inspiration to future research and studies on the subject of work, and that these may delve further into and expand on our results and conclusions.

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