

SUFFERING IN THE EVALUATION PROCESS IN LIGHT OF WORK PSYCHODYNAMICS

Amanda Dias Dourado^{1 2}, Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2709-6367>

Paulo César Zambroni-de-Souza^{1 3}, Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7353-4420>

Ivan Bolis^{1 4}, Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0688-0742>

ABSTRACT. The ideology that underlies the methodologies of the individual evaluation processes can lead to the path of illness and removal from the work environment. This article aims to understand the experiences of pathogenic suffering in the individual performance evaluation and to present suggestions for improvements in the light of the psychodynamics of work. Six workers participated in the study, who were removed from the work environment due to illness, users of a Reference Center for Occupational Health in a capital of northeastern Brazil. Before the removal, these workers worked in different functions and in different organizations, therefore, what unites this group is non-work. The instruments used were a sociodemographic questionnaire and a semi-structured interview, interpreted by thematic content analysis and with the theoretical help of psychodynamics at work. The existence of pathogenic suffering in the fragility of collectives, pressure for unattainable goals and humiliation in the exposure of the results was evidenced. We suggest designs of evaluative methodologies based on the analysis of the psychodynamics of work with the role of the worker in the analysis of the activity and at the time of feedbacks, with the encouragement of symbolic recognition and cooperation in the work environment.

Keywords: Suffering; mental health; employee performance appraisal.

SOFRIMENTO NO PROCESSO AVALIATIVO À LUZ DA PSICODINÂMICA DO TRABALHO

RESUMO. A operacionalização de metodologias avaliativas no ambiente laboral exerce influência na saúde e desempenho do trabalhador, tornando-se um tema que merece atenção nas organizações. Este artigo tem como objetivo investigar as experiências de sofrimentos na avaliação individual de desempenho e apresentar sugestões de melhorias à luz da psicodinâmica do trabalho. Participaram do estudo seis trabalhadores afastados do ambiente laboral por motivo de doença, usuários de um Centro de Referência em Saúde do Trabalhador de uma capital do nordeste brasileiro. Antes do afastamento, esses trabalhadores atuavam em diferentes funções e em diferentes organizações, portanto, o que une este grupo é a vivência da avaliação individual de desempenho e o afastamento do trabalho por motivo de doença. Utilizou-se como instrumentos um questionário sociodemográfico e uma entrevista semiestruturada e interpretada pela análise de conteúdo temática e com o auxílio teórico da psicodinâmica do trabalho. Evidenciou-se a existência

¹ Universidade Federal da Paraíba-UFPB, João Pessoa-PB, Brazil.

² E-mail: amanda.dias.dourado.rh@gmail.com

³ E-mail: paulozamsouza@yahoo.com.br

⁴ E-mail: bolis.ivan@yahoo.it



de sofrimentos patógenos na fragilização dos coletivos, competitividade, sensação de injustiça, pressão para alcançar metas, e humilhação na exposição dos resultados. Sugerem-se desenhos de metodologias avaliativas com o protagonismo do trabalhador na análise da atividade e no momento dos feedbacks, com estímulo do reconhecimento simbólico e cooperação no ambiente laboral.

Palavras-chave: Sofrimento; saúde mental; avaliação de desempenho profissional.

SUFRIMIENTO EN EL PROCESO DE EVALUACIÓN A LA LUZ DE LA PSICODINÁMICA DEL TRABAJO

RESUMEN. La ideología que subyace a las metodologías de los procesos de evaluación individual puede conducir al camino de la enfermedad y al alejamiento del entorno laboral. Este artículo tiene como objetivo comprender las experiencias de sufrimiento patógeno en la evaluación del desempeño individual y presentar sugerencias de mejora a la luz de la psicodinámica del trabajo. En el estudio participaron seis trabajadores, que fueron retirados del entorno laboral por enfermedad, usuarios de un Centro de Referencia de Salud Ocupacional en una capital del nordeste de Brasil. Antes de la remoción, estos trabajadores trabajaban en diferentes funciones y en diferentes organizaciones, por lo tanto, lo que une a este grupo es el no trabajo. Los instrumentos utilizados fueron un cuestionario sociodemográfico y una entrevista semiestructurada, interpretados por análisis de contenido temático y con la asistencia teórica de la psicodinámica en el trabajo. Se evidenció la existencia de sufrimiento patógeno en la fragilidad de los colectivos, presión por metas inalcanzables y humillación en la exposición de los resultados. Proponemos diseños de metodologías evaluativas basados en el análisis de la psicodinámica del trabajo con el rol del trabajador en el análisis de la actividad y en el momento de las retroalimentaciones, con el fomento del reconocimiento simbólico y la cooperación en el ámbito laboral.

Palabras clave: Sufrimiento; salud mental; evaluación del rendimiento de empleados.

Introduction

Since 1990, neoliberalism in Brazil has developed through a process of productive restructuring involving exploitation, flexibility, and evaluative methods that justify actions based on instrumental rationality and the maximization of organizations' economic and financial results. This marks the beginning of a form of work organization based on what Supiot (2015) calls "governance by numbers" and what Gaulejac (2017, pp. 71–72) calls "a risk of acute quantophobia (the disease of measurement) that lurks in all those who, instead of measuring to better understand, want to understand only what is measurable." This scenario affects the subjective relationship with work, influencing the semiology of psychic defenses and leading to an increasing number of workers suffering from work-related psychopathological disorders (Duarte & Dejours, 2019).

Since 1980, a performance management model has emerged that involves setting goals based on predetermined indicators. However, performance measurement is not an evaluation of work. As Dejours (2008) points out, there is no proportionality between performance and living work. Understanding living work is related to workers' subjective mobilization in their commitment and effort to face the suffering of work (Dejours, 2019). Thus, evaluations limited to financial profitability mask the human and social consequences

arising from them (Bodart et al., 2015). "Putting reality into an equation will never allow us to understand human behavior and the history of organizations" (Gaulejac, 2017, p. 73).

According to Bendassoli (2012), performance evaluation is an attempt to improve workers' potential, identify difficulties in human resource management, and increase profits. It is one of the pillars of success in organizational psychology. However, in recent decades, increasingly higher quantitative targets have been set, creating gaps that prevent performance evaluations from being considered an accurate predictor of workers' reality (Bodart et al., 2015; Dejours, 2008). Therefore, in the psychodynamics of work, evaluation must be rethought based on a more equitable process that values the work performed to preserve mental health and avoid pathogenic suffering.

Workers want to be valued and recognized. The expression of this symbolic recognition is directly linked to the evaluation of their work, raising questions about reliable and legitimate attempts to capture, measure, and judge their activity. According to Dejours (2008), individual performance evaluations fail to assess work and what is required to carry it out, thereby destroying collectives. When investment in evaluation focuses on increasing profit and production while disregarding its relationship with worker health and poor observation of the evaluation process stages, suffering, mental exhaustion, and a lack of skill development that could positively affect the organization and its workers will result.

Suffering exists on the fine line between health and illness, which highlights the importance of investigating this concept among specific groups. In this regard, Seligman-Silva (2003) cautions mental suffering is not solely a product of illness; individuals have defense mechanisms that activate when they feel threatened. There is a space between the prescribed organization and the worker who allows for flexibility in work activities to meet their needs. However, when this flexibility is exceeded, a barrier arises between the individual and the organization, marking the beginning of an arduous struggle against suffering (Dejours, 2017; Demaegdt, 2020; Guégen & Debout-Cosme, 2020; Rolo, 2017; Seligman-Silva, 2003).

According to Dejours (2017), normality is the result of a war between the suffering arising from organizational conditions and the defense mechanisms developed by workers to prevent or delay illness. This is a way of compensating for suffering and protecting workers' health. However, the continuous and excessive use of defense strategies can also harm workers (Medeiros et al., 2017). The struggle to maintain normality can result in creative suffering, which fosters growth, or pathological suffering, which occurs when rigid organizational pressures leave workers feeling helpless and frustrated.

While poor working conditions affect the body (e.g., asphyxiation, burns, fractures, injuries, violent death, drowning, and accidents), the organization of work can affect mental functioning since "managerial power mobilizes the psyche toward production goals" (Gaulejac, 2017, p. 1). According to Anjos and Mendes (2015), suffering is a source of mobilization; when a person feels fear, they exert effort to eliminate the risk of danger. This occurs when workers take on an exhausting workload to avoid losing their jobs. However, constant exposure to fear through threats, punishments, and penalties represents a subjective demobilization that can lead to illness over time.

Despite legal achievements, there is a growing reality of absenteeism due to mental disorders, alcohol abuse, and accidents caused by work experience (Cardoso & Morgado, 2019; Dejours, 2019; Gaulejac, 2017; Lazzerini & Pistolesi, 2018; Paula et al., 2016). Absence from work due to illness raises several questions about the risks to which workers' bodies and minds are vulnerable in certain working conditions and organizations. According

to Zambroni-de-Souza and Moraes (2018, p. 104), there is a dilemma for workers who are outside the wage-employment regime due to illness:

On the one hand, staying in a harmful job, even after recovering from sick leave, may lead to a recurrence or worsening of the problem. On the other hand, quitting may lead to other forms of suffering that are also harmful.

Absence from work can have negative consequences for mental health, affecting self-esteem, identity, support systems, and social relationships. According to Anjos and Mendes (2015, p. 43), "This situation worsens over time, destabilizing the individual's mental health and marginalizing them from society."

Considering the damage, that sick leave causes individuals, society, and the state, as well as the importance of the evaluation process in organizations, it is crucial to reflect on designing performance evaluation methodologies from a preventive perspective for worker health and safety. To this end, this article aims to investigate the suffering experienced by workers during the performance evaluation process due to illness and offer suggestions for improvement based on the psychodynamics of work.

Talking about work is an expression of bodily knowledge. However, when actively employed, workers may hide the obstacles they experience for two reasons. First, it is a defense strategy against pathogenic suffering. Second, they do so for fear of being penalized. This leads to a semiotic deficit that creates gaps in understanding. For workers removed from the work environment, this demand can be met by examining the situation from an outside perspective.

Work psychodynamics is a scientific approach that emerged from the intersection of ergonomics and psychoanalysis. It focuses on analyzing work experience as a fundamental aspect of producing subjectivity and pursuing health (Gernet, 2021). Studies based on this theory emphasize the connection between work experience dynamics and mental health (Gama et al., 2019) and propose that, during the subjective mobilization of workers, strategies are developed to cope with suffering by restoring the meaning of work (Amaral et al., 2017).

Method

This research was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee in accordance with Resolution 466/12 and is linked to CAAE approval certificate number 09311419.9.0000.5188. The study is a field study with a non-experimental, qualitative, descriptive, and exploratory design.

The research was conducted at the Regional Reference Center for Workers' Health (Centro Regional de Referência de Saúde do Trabalhador - CEREST) in a capital city in northeastern Brazil.

The study was conducted at the Regional Reference Center for Workers' Health (CEREST) in a capital city in northeastern Brazil. CERESTs aim to promote workplace safety and improve understanding of health issues at the local level (Dutra et al., 2016).

Participants

Six workers currently on leave from their workplace who sought assistance from CEREST to address suffering, illness, and social security issues participated in the study. The number of participants was determined based on representativeness, depth, and scope of the internal logic of the study's focus (Minayo, 2017).

Participants in the study were workers of both sexes who were absent from work due to work-related illness, were over 18 years old, had undergone an individual performance appraisal based solely on measured performance, and had at least two years of work experience. This allowed us to investigate the relationships established in the evaluation process over time. No minimum absence time was required (as the research focused on reflections on experiences while the workers were active). Finally, the workers were registered with CEREST, which provided access to their files and documentation of their entire illness and absence history. These files revealed psychological assessments and records of mental health issues that occurred before the onset of physical illness, such as symptoms of depression, anxiety attacks, stress, and sleep disorders. These issues also constituted a criterion for inclusion in the study.

Instruments

Individual interviews were used as an essential tool of practice (Dejours, 2017, p. 8) to listen to participants. The interviews followed a semi-structured script based on three themes: 1) understanding the experience of the individual performance evaluation process, 2) the occurrence of challenges or difficulties that arose in the performance evaluation, and 3) identifying the suffering that arose to achieve the required results in the evaluation process.

Additionally, a sociodemographic questionnaire was used to characterize the participants' profiles with personal data (gender, age, marital status, monthly income, and level of education) and professional data (job title, work organization, work schedule, length of service, complaint, or illness that led them to CEREST, and time away from work).

Procedures for collecting and analyzing results

After scheduling the dates, times, and locations of the individual interviews and obtaining the participants' permission, the interviews were recorded. They lasted between 43 minutes and 1 hour and 20 minutes, and the participants signed the free and informed consent form.

After transcribing the interviews in full, the analysis began based on Minayo's (2017) theoretical assumptions. Thematic content analysis identifies and interprets information patterns based on expository and explanatory organization (Souza, 2019). The results were analyzed using the theoretical assumptions of psychodynamic work theory (PDT).

Results and discussion

Sociodemographic Profile

As shown in Table 1, the study included three women and three men between the ages of 29 and 58. Most were single, earned one minimum wage, and had an incomplete elementary education. Table 2 shows the professional profile of the interviewees, who worked in various positions in different organizations. The length of service ranged from two to 19 years, and the length of time away from work ranged from two months to six years. The main reason workers sought CEREST was to take leave from work due to physical symptoms. The exception was participant 4, who was dismissed due to a GAD (generalized anxiety disorder) diagnosis. However, based on interviews and analysis of files, all participants were found to have had psychological problems preceding the onset of physical illness. According to Sato and Bernardo (2005), workers find it difficult to associate work

with mental health. The hegemony of positivist logic and victim-blaming hinders the search for CEREST help and corroborates the underreporting of mental illness at work.

Table 1 Personal Data of Participants

Person	Gender	Age	Income	Education	Estado Civil
1	Male	40	4 min salaries	Full technician	Single
2	Female	47	1 min salary	Fundamental In	Single
3	Male	42	1 min salary	Fundamental In	Married
4	Female	29	4 min salaries	Higher In	Single
5	Male	58	1 min salary	Fundamental In	Married
6	Female	55	5 min salaries	Complete senior	Divorced

Tabela 2 Dados Profissionais dos Participantes

Person	Role	Organization	Number of years of service	Complaint and/or diagnosis that led to CEREST	Time Away
1	Maintenance technician subsystem	Power Network	4	Pain in veins and muscles	2 months
2	Shoe operator	Shoe Factory	17	Pain in the arm and wrist	3 years
3	Shoe stockist	Loja de Sapato	19	Back and knee pain	4 years
4	Sales manager	Private Bank	9	Generalized Anxiety Disorder	8 months
5	Industrial machine operator	Fabric Yarn Factory	2	Dores nas pernas	6 years
6	Section head	Post Office	16	Carpal tunnel syndrome	2 months

Description of the Experienced Evaluation Process

A summary of the participants' experiences with the evaluation process is shown in Table 3. This summary is based on the participants' statements and refers to information about who evaluated the work, the objectives set, the frequency of feedback, and penalties.

All participants underwent an individual performance evaluation. In none of these evaluations did the participants take part in preparing or discussing the objectives to be achieved. The assistant commercial manager, session leader, and subsystem maintenance technician received these objectives and feedback via email. For the other workers, the objectives were communicated through informal conversations. Meetings to discuss work and situations of exposure and embarrassment were held only when the objectives were not achieved.

Table 3 Description of the evaluation process for each participant

Function	Who evaluated the work?	Stipulated objectives	How they evaluated and provided feedback	Punishment for not achieving the goal
Maintenance technician for subsystem	The immediate superior	Preparation of reports and maintenance of subsystem in the stipulated quantity and time	Billing for activities according to quantity and deadline. Once a year, feedback is sent by email.	Resignation and increased charges
Shoe operator - for gluing shoe soles	The cell leader	Achieve the goal of making 200 shoes per hour	Goal control. Once a month, a form indicated whether production was excellent, good, average, or poor.	A meeting where they received complaints about the results and dismissals.
Shoe stockist	The general manager	Organize the shoes in the box by size and in the specified order.	Inspection of inventory in the stipulated quantity. Informal feedback once a week.	Layoffs and exposure among colleagues
Assistant sales manager	The general manager	Achieve the target set for credit proposals	Control of credit proposal measurements. Feedback once a month by email.	Layoffs, exposure, used as a negative example
Industrial machine operator	The supervisor	Operate the machine to make the fabric thread at the specified time and quantity.	Monitors worker performance to ensure targets are met. Informal feedback once a month.	Layoffs and increased oversight.
Section head	The general manager	Achieve goals for monitoring agencies	Measurement control and agency supervision. Feedback once a month via email.	Layoffs, complaints, meetings

All participants mentioned that the evaluation process did not motivate them. Because of not achieving the stipulated objectives, all participants mentioned that a negative evaluation could lead to dismissal and self-blame. Some participants also mentioned humiliating consequences. There was a perceived lack of a standardized procedure for performance evaluations. These evaluations took the form of disclosing individual objectives and providing feedback based solely on measured performance. This feedback could lead to rewards, such as salary increases, or punishment, such as dismissal. There was no worker participation in designing individual performance evaluation policies.

Suffering during the evaluation process

Feeling of injustice

Participant 1 mentioned that he felt unfairly treated because they demanded many things at the same time, which was not considered in the evaluation process:

Now, imagine that you have to write a report by a certain deadline, but every few minutes, someone asks you to do something else. They say things like, "Oh, could you please help me with this? I don't know where," and you have to stop working on the report to do whatever it is they need. No matter how many times I said I wouldn't have time, they said, "Oh, you'll have time," so it showed up in my evaluation that I didn't deliver the report on time. However, how could I have delivered it? (Emphasis ours to indicate that it was a statement by a third party quoted by the participant.)

This participant's statement reveals a sense of limitation regarding the environment and its demands. When trying to fulfill their productive mission in the market, organizations set goals that consider the available resources needed to achieve them. Managers become increasingly demanding when they believe their employees can always do more than they imagine and are pressured by the organization's goals. They are all committed to the savage logic of economic rationality (Dejours, 2018).

In this situation, individual performance evaluations do not favor worker development. Thus, despite expending energy to perform well throughout the activity development process, workers receive no symbolic recognition for their zeal if there are no satisfactory measurable results (Dejours, 2008).

From a psychodynamic perspective, a suggestion for this demand begins with reflecting on the question, "What is the reality of work?" Regardless of their profession, workers will always use all their mental energy to engage their subjectivity and overcome the unexpected difficulties that arise in their work experience. Confronting this reality leads to feelings of injustice and failure. In turn, this opens up space for the mobilization of ingenuity and practical intelligence to overcome obstacles. In this process, affectivity is affected, and suffering ensues. This suffering is an inseparable part of confronting the unexpected (Gernet, 2021). This suffering becomes the target of specific psychic processes, such as sublimation and the pursuit of pleasure and professional growth, so that the subjective experience of suffering is not harmful. To this end, the evaluation process should include an analysis of the activity from the worker's perspective to provide the necessary resources to achieve the stipulated goals.

Absence of symbolic recognition

Participant 4 scored:

The only recognition we receive for our work is the salary we earn. That's what motivates us to stay in the job—I need the money. Completing our tasks is considered an obligation and nothing more. It's sad. I worked so hard. I just wanted to do my best and please others, but they limited our evaluation to whether we reached our targets. Not to mention, they terrorized us by hunting down mistakes to expose and humiliate us. They even schedule meetings for that purpose. I used to cry in the corner.

The statements "I tried so hard" and "I was always crying in corners" refer to the worker's engagement of their subjectivity. Workers need recognition to overcome the suffering caused by work (Anjos & Mendes, 2015). Personal fulfillment stems from the meaning and significance that workers attribute to their professional activities. Thus, the psychodynamics of work address recognition as a symbolic reward that impacts the individual's perception in society, despite being directed at work (Dejours, 2017).

We emphasize that feedback from work evaluations is an important moment for the evaluated person and an opportunity for development. Thus, identity and work are related through the power of judgment and recognition held by others. Judgment involves forming an opinion by evaluating the worker, while measurement concerns defining the value of certain quantities. In the case of generalized work evaluation procedures, the problem of recognition is amplified. This recognition is also reflected in customers who receive the

service and express gratitude, which is a form of recognition based on judgments about the activity performed.

In his work on the psychodynamics of labor, Dejours (2017) distinguishes between the types of judgments that superiors and peers can make. Superiors can make aesthetic judgments, while peers can make beauty judgments. The latter is difficult to achieve in a setting that encourages competitiveness among workers. The design of evaluation processes should consider not only material recognition (e.g., salary) but also symbolic recognition (e.g., personal fulfillment). Feedback should be given more attention in this regard to obtain an analysis from workers about their work and development.

Weakening of Work Collectives

Participant 3 reports a situation in which the director used what people knew about each other to encourage individualism, which proved to be a source of suffering: "[...] we have no friends at work; we are just colleagues. One person tries to bring down another to get ahead." This statement confirms Dejours's thesis that contemporary evaluation methods destroy collectives and harm workers (Dejours, 2017). By encouraging competition and individual actions, the performance evaluation process reaffirms the paradox between cooperation and competition, maximizing the exercise of power (Bodart et al., 2015).

According to Mendes (2013), there was a lack of reference to collective mobilization strategies that address how workers organize to achieve a common goal of overcoming the negative aspects imposed by the work situation. In this process, Mendes treats the space for discussion as a type of venting strategy.

In this space, words, beliefs, fears, and desires can be freely expressed to eliminate suffering.

According to Anjos and Mendes (2015), collective performance at work circumvents and reduces individual errors through cooperation. Thus, harmoniously integrating individual performances achieves superior results by maximizing each worker's talent contribution. To this end, relationships of solidarity, trust, and cooperation are necessary among colleagues.

In the context of work psychodynamics, cooperation and collective defense strategies are essential for employees to maintain health and cope with working conditions and organizational structures (Dejours, 2017). This article hypothesizes that measurement-based evaluation processes favor the emergence of pathologies among workers because "[...] in companies, if performance requirements become unsustainable, the risk of collapse also exists" (Dejours, 2018, p. 1). This collapse initially involves the end of cooperation and collectives, followed by a decline in each worker's health.

Participant 2 speaks of suffering due to a colleague's undermining attitude toward their results: "They have no sensitivity, and there is no reflection on this. Everyone is conditioned to be like this. They lie to undermine others and then pretend that nothing happened."

Work-related pathologies are affected by psychological processes, ethical issues, and the constitution of values that lead to respect and dignity in the profession (Dejours, 2017). The breakdown of rules of good coexistence can have devastating psychological consequences. Specific defenses of psychological functioning may arise that neutralize sensitivity to the suffering of others (Genet, 2017), as well as the trivialization of injustice and the degradation of collectives. On the other hand, Dejours (2018) describes ethical suffering from the betrayal of rules, which can lead to self-hatred and even suicide in the workplace.

It is crucial to emphasize evaluation processes that encourage group analysis and promote cooperative activities that foster support among workers. These processes should also maintain rules of good coexistence that promote well-being and quality of life at work. To this end, it is necessary to strengthen a common group identity without neglecting the personal recognition of work.

We also propose strategies to develop practical intelligence through an evaluation process that fosters symbolic recognition by superiors and peers. This resource combats suffering and transforms it into job satisfaction. According to Anjos and Mendes (2015), practical intelligence requires social validation that recognizes hierarchy and peers, especially through communication built by the collective of workers. Therefore, "[...] the recognition of the usefulness and beauty of work contributes to the longevity of this subjective mobilization" (Anjos & Mendes, 2015, p. 43).

The overload and humiliation of exposing results

Participant 4 reported situations of embarrassment in the assessment submitted:

From the moment, you email all the agencies saying that someone didn't meet the target, that person experiences enormous anxiety and pressure because they know that everyone can see that they didn't do it. They treated those who didn't succeed differently, using them as negative examples so that others wouldn't make the same mistakes in credit proposals. They sent this email to all the agencies, so it was giant exposure and very embarrassing.

The relationship between the subject and work is complex and represents an important element in the constitution of identity. At the same time, it reaches affective dimensions of possibilities for suffering (Amaral et al., 2017). Some companies strategically exploit workers' desire to demonstrate competence to guarantee employment, implementing evaluation practices that humiliate those being evaluated, causing everyone to become frantic in the pursuit of profit. The negative health effects do not correspond to the possibility of being evaluated but rather to the ideology that justifies management practices aimed solely at profitability, regardless of the cost to workers (Dejours, 2008).

Participant 5 talks about trying to meet the target: "I suffered because I noticed that I had no way of reaching that target. I worked and worked and saw no results." In their eagerness for recognition and to keep their jobs, workers find another source of suffering in their attempts to achieve good evaluation results: overload (Dejours, 2008).

When discussing evaluation in a precarious work context, one must consider the challenges of management by fear. According to Gama et al. (2019), investigating the effort subjects make in their work context is important to understanding the consequences of expressing their driving forces and expanding psychic activities. When the body is subjected to suffering, it mobilizes to find solutions to the reality of work.

Workers experience pleasure when they reach their production goals. Failing to achieve these goals can lead to sadness and feelings of incapacity, which can undermine their work identity. Meeting established requirements is considered recognition of competence more than achieving a goal. Thus, in a pathological scenario, those who receive the best evaluations become slaves to the paradigm of financial reward, becoming increasingly frantic to meet organizational demands. Meanwhile, those who receive poor evaluations are disqualified and considered incompetent.

This scenario opens the door to pathogenic suffering, which is characterized by an insistence on remaining at work despite illness. According to Seligmann-Silva (2010, p. 3), this phenomenon, known as presenteeism, means that "sick people are working without

complaining and generally without seeking treatment, while their clinical conditions worsen and become chronic, and their performance inevitably suffers as well." Whysall et al. (2018) found that presenteeism is more likely to occur in poorer psychosocial environments. In our study, which included participants from various work environments, we identified presenteeism as a precursor to illness and leave among all interviewees.

In this regard, effective management strategies are needed to prevent illness or disease progression by adapting assessment methods to workers' physical and mental health limits. Participant 6's testimony shows that a negative evaluation result led to excessive surveillance, which compromised her performance and added to her self-imposed pressure. Not meeting goals is linked to the possibility of immediate dismissal, which is a strong source of tension in itself.

The worst thing was that if you didn't give him a target, he would stay there, breathing down your neck; that's what causes the most suffering, because it's embarrassing: the person is there the whole time, watching you, because you're not getting it done, because you're falling behind. We feel pressured, and while I was worried about him looking at me, evaluating me, I was not producing, right? Worried about him there [...]

The pressure to maximize results was abusive towards these workers. They faced intense psychological pressure to achieve targets, which compromised their psychological and social well-being and could lead to moral harassment (Barreto & Heloani, 2015). Management that uses evaluation processes as a tool to achieve objectives must consider the long-term consequences, as the institutionalized speed paradigm leads to an increase in workplace mental health issues.

A psychodynamic analysis of work suggests that evaluation policy designs should be based on occupational health and safety and the development of skills that positively impact productivity while considering the human and social repercussions. Mendes (2013) suggests an analysis of reformulations in evaluation methodologies based on what he defends as constitutive elements of subjective mobilization: practical intelligence, space for discussion, and cooperation.

Regarding goals, they can be an efficient practice for achieving the desired results of companies and workers. However, there is a warning against goals that are abusive and beyond the capabilities of workers, as these goals can degrade the relationships that formed collectives. In this regard, we agree with Dejours (2008) who asserts that such forms of evaluation greatly contribute to the increase of work-related pathologies.

Additionally, we highlight the importance of having a psychology professional present during evaluation feedback sessions to prevent work-related suffering from taking a pathogenic path. This ensures that there are no constraints or exposures that negatively affect subjective mobilization in the workplace, which is essential for professional development. It enables workers to face the unexpected and resolve unforeseen issues.

Final considerations

While investigating the suffering that arises from the evaluation process, we identified feelings of injustice, a lack of recognition, weakened work collectives, insufficient resources for achieving goals, psychological pressure, and humiliation when presenting results. These findings corroborate criticisms by Dejours (2008) and Gaulejac (2017) about the harmful consequences of exalting individual and quantitative evaluation.

Considering the identified pathogenic suffering, the following suggestions for improving evaluation processes were made in light of the psychodynamics of work: 1) returning the protagonist role to the worker in the analysis of the activity as a starting point for designing evaluation methodologies, 2) investing more time in feedback moments to provide symbolic recognition and work development, 3) encouraging confrontation between measurement and aesthetic and beauty judgments as points of analysis for work results (from this confrontation arises the subjectivity of workers who desire contributive justice when being recognized and developing during the activity), and 4) proposing group evaluations for activities that encourage work cooperation.

Although the main illnesses that lead to absence from work involve physical impairments, pathological suffering is mentioned by all participants as occurring before physical limitations arose. This highlights the difficulty workers have in relating work to mental health. This contributes to the underreporting of mental illness in the workplace and a bias toward positivist logic and victim blaming.

As a limitation of the study, the results cannot be generalized and must be considered in specific contexts. This article did not deny the importance or necessity of evaluating work, nor did it present an evaluative methodology as ideal. Each organizational context implies a specific demand. The article aimed to provide reflections, suggestions, and questions regarding the subjective impact of performance evaluation methodologies on suffering and illness from the perspective of work psychodynamics. At stake in this relationship is the health of workers in their experience of mobilization in the face of work reality.

Faced with the reality of pneumonia etiologically associated with the SARS-CoV-2 virus, extreme confinement measures have become a political mechanism that marks unpredictability in social, political, and economic consequences. On the one hand, attempts are being made to prevent the disease, and on the other hand, negative effects are being redistributed throughout society by changing the ways people work and maximizing the potential for the emergence of work-related illnesses. This article provides an important source of material to support the reconstruction of organizational policies that are tailored to human needs. In addition, it contributes to the advancement of studies for the development of effective strategies in the design of assessment practices that place work as a mediator that promotes health and professional development, rather than illness and absence from work, especially in light of current production demands.

References

- Amaral, G. A., Mendes, A. M., Bezerra, C. D. S., & Carvalho, I. S. (2017). O lugar do conceito de sublimação na psicodinâmica do trabalho. *Revista Polis e Psique*, 7(3), 200-223. http://pepsic.bvsalud.org/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S2238-152X2017000300012&lng=pt&tlng=pt
- Anjos, F. B., & Mendes, A. M. A. (2015). Psicodinâmica do não-trabalho: estudo de caso com concurseiros. *Revista Laborativa*, 4(1), 35-55. <http://ojs.unesp.br/index.php/rlaborativa>
- Barreto, M., & Heloani, R. (2015). Violência, saúde e trabalho: a intolerância e o assédio moral nas relações laborais. *Revista Serviço Social & Sociedade*, 544-561. <http://www.scielo.br/pdf/sssoc/n123/0101-6628-sssoc-123-0544.pdf>

- Bendassolli, P. F. (2012). Desempenho do trabalho: revisão da literatura. *Psicologia Argumento*, 30(68), 171- 184. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7213/psicol.argum.5895>
- Bodart, C. das N., Santos, G. dos., & Ferreira, L. da P. N. (2015). Avaliação de desempenho: uma análise crítica a partir da perspectiva dos avaliados. *Revista Foco*, 8(2), 103-116. <http://revistafocoadm.org/index.php/foco/article/view/132/120>
- Cardoso, A. C., & Morgado, L. (2019). Trabalho e saúde do trabalhador no contexto atual: ensinamentos da Enquete Europeia sobre Condições de Trabalho. *Revista Saúde e Sociedade*, 28(1), 169-181. <https://doi.org/10.1590/s0104-12902019170507>
- Dejours, C. (2008). *Avaliação do trabalho submetido à prova do real: crítica aos fundamentos da avaliação*. São Paulo: Blucher.
- Dejours, C. (2017). Prefácio. In C. Dejours (Dir), *Psicodinâmica do trabalho: casos clínicos* (pp. 6-10). Porto Alegre: Dbulinense.
- Dejours, C. (2018). La domination au travail est beaucoup plus dure qu'avant. *Anti-K*. <https://www.anti-k.org/2018/10/21/christophe-dejours-la-domination-au-travail-est-beaucoup-plus-dure-quavant/>
- Dejours, C. (2019). Psicanalista francês fala sobre a relação entre os adoecimentos mentais e o trabalho. *Revista Proteção*. http://www.protecao.com.br/materias/entrevistas/psicanalista_frances_fala_sobre_a_relacao_entre_os_adoecimentos_mentais_e_o_trabalho/JyjaAc
- Demaegdt, C. (2020). Centralité du travail et sublimation. *Topique*, 29-40.
- Duarte, A., & Dejours, C. (2019). Le harcèlement au travail et ses conséquences psychopathologiques: une clinique qui se transforme. *L'Évolution Psychiatrique*, 84(2), 337-345.
- Dutra, F. C. M. S., Costa, L. C., & Sampaio, R. F. (2016). A influência do afastamento do trabalho na percepção de saúde e qualidade de vida de indivíduos adultos. *Fisioterapia e Pesquisa*, 23(1), 98-104. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1809-2950/14900923012016>
- Gama, L. P., Mendes, A. M., Lazzarini, E. R., & Vieira, F. O. (2019). (Im)possibilidade de investimento pulsional no trabalho: análise de um caso em clínica do trabalho. *Trivium - Estudos Interdisciplinares*, 11(1), 113-122. <https://dx.doi.org/10.18379/2176-4891.2019v1p.113>
- Gaulejac, V. de. (2017). *Gestão como doença social*. São Paulo: Ideias & Letras.
- Gernet, I. (2017). À propos des enjeux subjectifs de la réparation. In N. Chaignot-Delage & C. Dejours (Eds.), *Clinique du travail et évolution du droit* (pp. ?-?). Paris: PUF.
- Gernet, I. (2021). Approche clinique et psychopathologique du burn out: discussion à partir de la psychodynamique du travail, *L'Évolution Psychiatrique*, 1 (86), 119-130. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evopsy.2020.11.001>

- Gueguen, H., & Debout-Cosme, F. (2020). Théories de la reconnaissance et travail médical. *Médecine et Philosophie*, 3, 7-15. http://medecine-philosophie.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2_Gueguen_Cosme_Reconnaissance_travail-1.pdf
- Lazzerini, B., & Pistolesi, F. (2018). An integrated optimization system for safe job assignment based on human factors and behavior. *IEEE Systems Journal*, 12(2), 1158-1169. <https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/document/7829289>
- Medeiros, S. N., Martins, S. R., & Mendes, A. M. (2017). Sofrimento e defesa: análise psicodinâmica do trabalho de monitoramento aéreo de trânsito. *Trivium - Estudos Interdisciplinares*, 9(1), 74-90. <https://dx.doi.org/10.18379/2176-4891.2017v1p.74>
- Mendes, A. M. (2013). O sofrimento nas organizações: A psicodinâmica do trabalho como instrumento de análise. In M. C. Bohle, L. C. Lima, & R. S. Machado (Orgs.), *Organizações, trabalho e saúde mental: diálogos possíveis* (pp. 41–60). Belo Horizonte: Maresia.
- Minayo, M. C. de S. (2017). Amostragem e saturação em pesquisa qualitativa: consensos e controvérsias. *Revista Pesquisa Qualitativa*, 5(7), 01-12. <https://editora.sepq.org.br/index.php/rpq/article/view/82/59>
- Paula, E. A. de., Buschinelli, J. T., Maeno, M., & Costa, R. F. da. (2016). Qualidade de vida de trabalhadores com LER/DORT e lombalgia ocupacional atendidos no Cerest de Guarulhos, São Paulo. *Revista Brasileira de Saúde Ocupacional*, 41(19). <https://doi.org/10.1590/2317-6369000120115>
- Rolo, D. (2017). Le burn out: mal d'époque ou retour de la fatigue pathologique? *Annales Médico-Psychologiques, Revue Psychiatrique*, 175(7), 595-599.
- Sato, L., & Bernardo, M. H. (2005). Saúde mental e trabalho: os problemas que persistem. *Revista Ciências, Saúde Coletiva*, 10(4), 869-878. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S1413-81232005000400011>.
- Seligman-Silva, E. (2003). Psicopatologia do trabalho: aspectos contemporâneos. In E. Seligman-Silva & R. Mendes. *Patologia do trabalho* (pp. 64-98). São Paulo: Atheneu. https://feapsico2012.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/edith_seligmann_silva.pdf
- Seligman-Silva, E. (2010). *Acidentes de trabalho e a dimensão psíquica*. São Paulo: 3. https://www3.fmb.unesp.br/sete/pluginfile.php/20376/mod_page/content/1/Edith_-_ACIDENTES_TRABALHO_PSIQUISMO.pdf
- Souza, L. K. (2019). Pesquisa com análise qualitativa de dados: conhecendo a análise temática. *Arquivos Brasileiros de Psicologia*, 71(2), 51-67. <https://dx.doi.org/10.36482/1809-5267.ARBP2019v71i2p.51-67>
- Supiot, A. (2015). *La gouvernance par les nombres*. Paris: Fayard.
- Whysall, Z., Bowden, J., & Hewitt, M. (2018). Sickness presenteeism: measurement and management challenges, *Ergonomics*, 61(3), 341-354. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28791918/>

Zambroni-de-Souza, P. C., & Moraes, T. D. (2018). Reflexões sobre a dinâmica psíquica de trabalhadores afastados do trabalho. *Fractal: Revista de Psicologia*, 30(2), 103-111. <https://doi.org/10.22409/1984-0292/v30i2/5866>

Received: May 28, 2021

Approved: May 5, 2022.