Well-being and Ill-being at Work: Employee's Representations in a Brazilian Public Company*

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ABSTRACT – The present work aims to identify the thematic cores concerning employees' representations of well-being and ill-being at work in a Brazilian public company. Data were collected using open-ended questions from the Quality of Work Life Assessment Questionnaire. 5,833 workers participated in the study and were predominantly male (62%), with a mean age of 46.7 (SD = 11.61), married (58.7%), and with higher education (37.17%). We used the software Alceste for data treatment. The results revealed that the main sources of ill-being at work was bureaucratic labor organization (25%) and of well-being at work was importance and meaningfulness of work (24%). Organizational management is at the origin of ill-being at work and must be the object of corporate changes.

KEYWORDS: activity-centered ergonomics, ill-being at work, quality of work life, public company, well-being at work

Mal-Estar e Bem-Estar no Trabalho: Representações de Trabalhadores de Empresa Pública Brasileira

RESUMO – A pesquisa buscou identificar os núcleos temáticos das representações de bem-estar e mal-estar no trabalho de empregados de empresa pública brasileira. Os dados foram coletados por meio de questões abertas do Inventário de Avaliação de Qualidade de Vida no Trabalho. Participaram 5.833 trabalhadores: idade 46,7 (DP 11,61); sexo masculino (62%); casados (58,7%); curso superior (37,17%). Utilizou-se o aplicativo Análise Lexical do Contexto de um Conjunto de Segmentos de Textos (Alceste) no tratamento dos dados. Os resultados revelaram as principais fontes de mal-estar no trabalho (e.g. organização burocrática do trabalho, 25%) e de bem-estar no trabalho (e.g. importância e significado do trabalho, 24%). A gestão organizacional está na origem do mal-estar no trabalho e deve ser objeto das mudanças corporativas.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: mal-estar no trabalho, bem-estar no trabalho, qualidade de vida no trabalho, ergonomia da atividade, empresa pública

The world of work has undergone significant changes in recent decades. Many of these changes are a reflection of the advent of productive restructuring. The fruits of this restructuring include market internationalization, the technological revolution, and regulation of labor. Some changes that affected labor relations include the flexibility of wages, of working hours, and of collective bargaining structures (Martins & Molinaro, 2013). Since the 1970s, these changes have had an effect on the organization of production, resulting in the intensification and precariousness of work as their main consequences (Albuquerque, 2011; Dal Rosso, 2008; Green, 2004; Oliveira, 2010; Santos, 2014). Todeschini and Ferreira (2013) and Araújo (2010) point out that in the last fifty years an extensive set of occupational and work-related diseases has emerged as an effect and consequence of lasting experiences of ill-being at work, highlighting increasing numbers of occupational accidents, general trauma, musculoskeletal disorders, mental disorders, and burnout. This scenario in itself serves as a justification for discussing and investigating malaise at work and its impacts on workers. In addition, the context poses new challenges for workers who need to develop strategies to

mediate and minimize the effects of malaise and promote well-being at work (Castel, 2003; Direnzo & Greenhaus, 2011; Ferreira, 2008). Studies have shown the impacts of productive restructuring on workers, which suggests a close relationship between these impacts and ill-being at work.

Taking this scenario of change as a reference, the general objective of this research was to map the main sources of well-being and ill-being at work based on the perceptions of workers of a Brazilian public company. From the academic point of view, this study is justified by the importance of investigating the sources of well-being and ill-being at work that provide reflections and relevant contributions to the scientific literature on the topics addressed. Knowing the extent to which organizations functioning may be the source of well-being and ill-being at work remains a scientific research challenge in the context of organizations. In the literature, the issue of well-being at work has been the subject of different conceptualizations and approaches (Taris & Schaufeli, 2015). Approaches range from broader conceptions - involving the individual as a whole - to more specific understandings of the phenomenon – restricted to the contexts experienced by individuals –, which influences study designs (Danna & Griffin, 1999; Warr, 1987). In this given research scenario, the concept of ill-being at work remains strongly absent (Ferreira & Seidl, 2009).

The use of the theoretical-methodological framework Activity-Centered Ergonomics Applied to Quality of Work Life (AEA_QWL), developed by Ferreira (2007, 2008, 2011, 2015a, 2015b), provided empirical support for our research (such as the identification of new sources of ill-being at work), which favored the improvement of the discussion on the subject. In the applied perspective, the relevance of knowing the sources of ill-being and well-being at work is highlighted, based on the workers' perceptions for the construction of policies that allow an innovative and effective organizational transformation that balances well-being and organizational goals. From the social point of view, studies of this nature carried out in public institutions can enable the improvement of organizational management and services provided by organizations, that is, the effective exercise of citizenship, thus ensuring the fulfillment of their social role.

WELL-BEING AND ILL-BEING AT WORK

The constructs well-being and ill-being at work have been analyzed as elements to understand an individual's perception about his or her work context. We realize that there is little convergence between the still scarce concepts, especially when we think about ill-being at work.

Although there is a growing volume of research on ill-being at work, a clear definition of the term is diffuse and residual in the literature. The concept often brings in its core associations with suffering at work, as if suffering were a consequence of ill-being and ill-being a result of suffering (Antloga & Avelar, 2013; Antloga et al., 2014; Bauman, 1998).

Ill-being at work emerges, according to Périco and Justo (2011), as an alienation and as a result of the impossibility of achieving sublimation at work, either due to internal (psychological) or external (social) issues. According to these authors, "in a fateful way, as a rule, the great mass exploited at work carries the unhappiness of being far from these internal or external issues, necessary for sublimation at work" (p. 155).

According to Bendassoli (2011) "the ill-being of civilization is indeed caused by ill-being at work" (p. 67). The author discusses how the relationship between a person and his/her work was built over time, associating ill-being with suffering at work, and points out the clinic of activity approach as an alternative intervention to its impacts.

Seeking a definition of ill-being at work, Ferreira and Seidl (2009) highlight the dialectical character of well-being and ill-being that cohabit the world of work and describe the concept as a kind of "the reverse of the medal:" one understands ill-being at work better due to the absence of the structural elements of well-being at work.

Our literature review revealed a predominance of studies that seek to relate ill-being at work with some factors that promote worker's perception, such as precarious working conditions, inadequate work organization, and professional exhaustion (Araújo et al., 2005; Chávez, 2009; Maciel et al., 2006). Other studies associate ill-being at work with individual variables, such as subjective experiences in childhood (Silva, 2005) and stress (Aznar et al., 2006).

We also identified a diversity of studies on teacher malaise (Aznar et al., 2006; Garcia & Llorens, 2003; Pinto et al., 2013; Rauber & Rebolo, 2011; Reis, 2013; Silva, 2005; Timm et al., 2010). These authors pointed out as sources of ill-being the intensification of work, working conditions, job saturation, bureaucracy, and institutional policy, all of which lead to suffering with work-related stress, imbalance between professional and personal life, and alienation.

The study by Antloga et al. (2014), conducted with workers from a federal public institution, identified the main perceptions of ill-being at work in that context. According to that study, representations of ill-being are related to the following factors: organizational management; physical working conditions; unequal treatment between positions and careers; and injustice and lack of autonomy.

As with the definition of ill-being at work, there is no consensus in the scientific literature around a single definition of well-being at work (Schulte & Vainio, 2010; Gomide et al., 2015). Studies on well-being at work began to stand out in the literature from the 1950s, when well-being

was strongly associated with happiness, with well-being as a subjective concept and an indicator of quality of life. The main studies revolved around two philosophical currents: hedonism and eudaimonism (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Santos & Ceballos, 2013).

The concept of well-being at work, in turn, can be understood on the basis of three components associated with positive work relationships: job satisfaction, job involvement, and affective organizational commitment. In this line, the construct involves a hierarchical model of happiness (Siqueira & Padovam, 2008).

Bringing the terms well-being and happiness closer is also the perspective of Paschoal et al. (2010). In this sense, well-being at work is understood as the prevalence of positive emotions at work and the individual's perception that their performance allows the development of their potentials and the achievement of their life goals. Thus, well-being at work includes affective and cognitive aspects and is organized around three factors: positive affectivity, negative affectivity, and personal fulfillment at work.

Pinto et al. (2013) state that "well-being presupposes some kind of reward in the exercise of the professional activity" (p. 46). This reward, according to the authors, is independent of being a financial reward or the achievement of the objectives attributed to the work.

The concepts of well-being and ill-being at work adopted in this research are in line with what was proposed by Ferreira and Seidl (2009), in agreement with the approach called Activity-Centered Ergonomics Applied to Quality of Work Life (AEA_QWL), developed by Ferreira (2008, 2011, 2015a, 2015b, 2017). According to this approach (Ferreira, 2017), well-being at work is characterized by positive emotions and moods that originate from the situations experienced by the individual(s) in performing job tasks. The individual or collective manifestation of well-being at work, in turn, is characterized by the experience of emotions/moods (isolated or associated) that occur, most frequently, in the following modalities: joyful, willing, pleased, enthusiastic, happy, excited, proud, and peaceful.

The lasting experience of this mode of emotions/moods by workers constitutes a factor of health promotion in work situations and indicates the presence of quality of work life (QWL). On the other hand, ill-being at work is defined by negative emotions and moods that originate from the situations experienced by the individual(s) in performing job tasks. The individual or collective manifestation of ill-being at work is characterized by the experience of emotions/moods (isolated or associated) that occur, most frequently, in the following modalities: annoyed, depressed, bored, upset, impatient, worried, anxious, frustrated, bothered, nervous, tense, angry, and scared. The lasting experience of this mode of emotions/moods by workers constitutes a risk factor for health in work situations and indicates the absence of quality of work life. This psychological state is configured as a mental representation of workers. Their perceptions about the factors that structure QWL include working conditions, social-professional organization and relationships at work, professional recognition and growth, and work-life balance.

Based on the AEA_QWL (Albuquerque, 2011; Andrade, 2011; Branquinho, 2010; Daniel, 2012; Fernandes, 2013; Figueira, 2014; Maia, 2014; Medeiros, 2012; Santos, 2014), studies have shown that the experiences of well-being and ill-being at work are related to five factors that structure QWL: working conditions (e.g. instrumental support provided in the organizational context); work organization (e.g. work load, pressure at work, working hours and demand present in the organizational context); social-professional work relationships (e.g. social-professional interactions inherent in coexistence, trust, access to management, communication, and fairness in the distribution of tasks); recognition and professional growth (e.g. opportunities, recognition of work outcomes, creativity, social recognition, managerial incentives, and pleasure at work); and work-life balance (e.g. perceptions about the institution, work, and analogies with social life that influence work activity) (Ferreira, 2012). In this sense, it is necessary to act on these factors to remove or mitigate the negative impacts that are caused by ill-being at work.

METHOD

This is a qualitative empirical study, characterized as a case study. Qualitative research is characterized by understanding as the principle of knowledge, the pursuit of a subjective construction of reality by the discovery and construction of theories, and by being a text-based science (Flick et al., 2000; Günther, 2006). A case study is characterized by preserving the unitary character of the phenomenon without separating it from its context, investigating it *in loco* and in depth (Gil, 2009). Such a methodological perspective is aligned with the research design advocated in the AEA_QWL insofar as this approach is based on the epistemological assumption that the nature of the object drives the choice of study design and the use of more appropriate instrumentation rather than the reverse (Amalberti et al., 1991; Guerin et al., 2001). In addition, both the object and research question of the present research are associated with AEA_QWL's central paradigm of investigating the experiences of well-being and ill-being at work based on the perceptions that workers construct about the organizational context in which they are inserted (Ferreira , 2017).

Brief Characterization of the Research Field: Institution and Mission

The present research was developed in a public company linked to the federal executive branch of Brazil, created with the objective of modernizing and speeding up the strategic sectors of Brazilian Public Administration. The company's mission is to provide information and provide technological solutions for the success of state management in service to Brazilian society. Its vision calls for being a center of information and technological solutions for Brazil.

According to information provided by the agency, the main products and services offered by the company are as follows: open government information; information technology solutions; consulting in information technology; structuring systems of the Federal Government; information security; and information technology systems for a smart national logistics network.

The strategic components of the organization establish as premises: (a) to achieve and improve the recognition of customers: government, society, and citizens; (b) provide services effectively and safely; (c) develop and employ innovative technological solutions; (d) establish partnerships and cooperation for the development of solutions; (e) practice integrated and participatory management; (f) keep employees engaged and motivated; (g) act with ethics, transparency, and social, environmental, and economic sustainability.

The company has several regional branches, two in Brasilia and the others in Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Recife, Curitiba, Salvador, Belem, Belo Horizonte, Porto Alegre, Fortaleza, and Florianopolis.

Participants

At the time of data collection, the company had 12,357 employees. Of these, 7,677 are part of the internal staff, while the others make up an external service personnel.

A total of 5,833 people participated in the survey, corresponding to 47.2% of the collective workforce. Of the total staff employed, 4,065 employees (69.7%) answered the survey. This adherence highlights the effectiveness of awareness-raising activities carried out by the researchers together with the management team of the company's QWL program, which ensured a significant participation of employees in the research. The socio-demographic and professional profile of the participants (valid n = 4,436) presents the following characteristics: mean age of 46.7 (SD = 11.61); male predominance (62%); married (58.7%); higher education level (37.17%); analyst position (50.4%); admission through public examination (52.9%); 16 years of service on average (SD = 12.96); average length of time in company of 8.68 years (SD = 8.88).

Assessment Tools

We used the Quality of Work Life Assessment Questionnaire (QWL_AQ), version 2.0 (Ferreira, Paschoal & Ferreira, 2013). QWL_AQ is a quantitative and qualitative tool that enables the diagnosis and mapping of QWL in organizational contexts based on workers' perceptions. In the qualitative part, the instrument comprises four open-ended questions. This part of the inventory allows not only to deepen/complement the quantitative data collected in the methodological design, but also to enrich and add greater accuracy to the data. QWL_AQ's open-ended questions aim to gain a broader understanding of respondents' views on the concept of QWL, sources of well-being and ill-being at work, and provide space for comments and suggestions. In view of the purpose of this article, we chose to use only two questions that make up the instrument: "When I think of my work at [Organization Name], what contributes the most to my well-being is ..." and "When I think about my work at [Organization Name], what contributes the most to my ill-being is ... ". They proved to be sufficient and pertinent to reach the objective of this research.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Before data collection, awareness strategies were carried out, such as lectures and flyer distribution. All sensitization steps were carried out jointly between researchers and the organization's multiprofessional team. The instrument was applied via the Internet, hosted outside the company's website, to ensure information security and increase audience participation and reliability of responses. Passwords were generated and printed, which were randomly distributed, accompanied by a research disclosure flyer. In the initial screen of access to the instrument, participants were presented with ethical aspects regarding voluntary participation, the possibility of withdrawing participation without causing harm or personal injury, the absence of risks to the activities or the institution, the confidentiality of the participants' data and the guarantee of anonymity, as recommended by Resolution 466/12 of the National Health Council, part of the Ministry of Health (Resolution MS no. 466, 2012).

RESULTS

We used the software Alceste (Lexical Contextual Analysis of a Text Segment Set) to treat the data. The program identifies essential information from the answers in order to extract the structuring thematic classes of speech or core themes, offering organized statistical tests to help the analysis of textual data extracted from the text (Reinert, 1990).

The quantitatively expressive participation of respondents in the open-ended questions of the instrument reinforces the role of awareness raising, highlighting the reliability of employees to the survey. In addition, the open-ended questions used provided workers with an important speaking space so that they can give visibility to their perceptions about the organizational context in which they are inserted. Since the completion of the open-ended questions was optional, not all research participants answered both questions, as shown in the description of the core themes below.

We identified the core themes that structured the respondents' discourse about the sources of well-being and ill-being at work with the software Alceste. The main terms and phrases produced in the speeches were grouped in tables to facilitate the understanding of each core theme.

The sources of ill-being at work were mapped with the question "When I think of my work at [Organization Name], what contributes the most to my ill-being is ...". A total 5,094 workers responded to the question (valid cases), and Alceste identified seven core themes, with respective percentages of speech produced: bureaucratic labor organization (25%); inadequate working conditions and stressful commuting (21%); conflicting relationships and unequal treatment (15%); downgrading of technical merit (13%); lack of appreciation and recognition by society (10%); injustice and iniquity (9%); and lack of professional growth prospect (7%). Table 1 illustrates the result.

The sources of well-being at work were obtained through the analysis of the question "When I think of my work at [Organization Name], what contributes the most to my well-being is ...", with 4,887 respondents. Alceste revealed the existence of six core themes: importance and meaningfulness of work (24%); harmonious labor relations (22%); social relevance of work and opportunity to develop skills (19%); stability and benefits (14%); do what you like for work (13%); and comfortable working conditions (8%). Table 2 illustrates the result.

Table 1

Thematic cores, percentages, and examples of representative segments of the sources of ill-being at work

Thematic Cores	%	Examples of Representative Fragments	Key Terms/Expressions
Bureaucratic labor organization	25	• "Performing merely bureaucratic tasks to satisfy the need for the process and not the product to be developed." • "Lack of tools that integrate information, with much rework." • "The difficulty to perform fundamental tasks to complete the work. Relatively simple tasks have become so difficult to complete that they are discouraging." • "The quality control imposed. Because we have to follow certain predetermined rules, we can't change not one iota."	Bureaucracy; Strict quality control; Rework; Lack of agility; Lack of flexibility; Excessive norms.
Inadequate working conditions and stressful commuting	21	• "Because the time is not flexible, I have to get traffic commuting to and from work. Since I live far away, I end up spending 12h of my day with work, because I work 8h, plus 1h at lunchtime and because of the heavy traffic, I spend 1h to go to work and 1h to go back home." • "The problem is coming to work and coming back home. The number of cars on the road is huge, there are accidents and traffic jams every day. Sometimes I get to work tired." • "Enclosed environment without adequate ventilation." • "Excessive noise in the workplace, impairing concentration." • "Ill-being to me is the lighting: it's extremely inadequate causing daily headaches."	Inadequate ventilation, noise, lighting, and furniture; Mold; Long travel time; Traffic.

Table 1

Cont.

Thematic Cores	%	Examples of Representative Fragments	Key Terms/Expressions
Conflicting relationships and unequal treatment	15	• "The arrogance and protectionism of certain bosses with their subordinates. For friends everything; for enemies the law." • "Training course only for sycophants who spend time together during coffee breaks and those who don't are not part of the group." • "Ordinary non-clique employees have no chance of demonstrating their potential because they are not given opportunities, projects, managerial positions, responsibilities."' • "Understanding the difference in treatment for the preferred ones compared to the neglected ones. For friends everything: unconditional promotion, condescending to mistakes." • "Heavy harassment and disrespect by some bosses."	Protectionism; Injustice; Gossip; Conflicts; Difficult relationship; Lack of Cooperation and Dialogue.
Downgrading of technical merit	13	• "Decisions taken that do not take into account implementation difficulties for staff, which do not have any reasonability in themselves; political interference in decisions on technical issues." • "The overlap of political influence over technical knowledge in purely technical decisions." • "Decisions do not always take into account criteria of justice or technique, but friendships and vested interests." • "Knowing that my professional growth is conditioned to playing office politics. Knowing that promotions are made not based on capacity, but on interests.	Subjective promotion criteria; Lack of transparency; Downgrading of technical criteria; Favoritism.
Lack of appreciation and recognition by society	10	• "Society's lack of knowledge about our role and lack of commitment of those responsible for the company to fight for greater professional appreciation with salaries compatible with other companies or federal government agencies." • "Knowing that society does not value the company as it values other governmental bodies. Most citizens don't even know about the services our institution provides." • "Lack of notoriety, recognition, and relevance of the company by the society." • "The work developed by the company is extremely important within the federal government and we are little recognized, both internally and externally."	"Low pay, lack of recognition, and relevance; Lack of notoriety of the company by society."
Injustice and iniquity	9	• "Knowing there are people earning almost twice what I earn to do less than half of what I do." • "Today, as a 61-year-old amnestied woman, I need to continue working without hope of being able to have a decent retirement." • "Now that I can retire, doing the math, the figures just make me wanna cry! I just wasted my time in this company. Now it's too late." • "Having been wronged in the past and continuing to pay for a mistake that I didn't make."	Amnestied people situation; Concern with retirement; Lack of recognition for dedication; Injustice in the distribution of bonuses.
Lack of professional growth perspective	7	• "Knowing I'm going to work with no career prospects. It's really very frustrating." • "The pay is very low and the prospects are even worse." • "The lack of a real career path. The system of progression on merit is shamefully subjective." • "See colleagues with invaluable talent seek better pay and real opportunity for professional growth in another industry for lack of encouragement."	No growth based on job titles; Almost impossible progression; Lack of incentive.

Table 2

Thematic cores, percentages, and examples of representative fragments of the sources of well-being at work

Thematic Cores	%	Examples of Representative Fragments	Key Terms/Expressions
Importance and meaningfulness of work	24	• "Seeing the company name on national and international news as the largest computer company in Latin America. Only God knows how proud I am to be part of the staff." • "Identifying some specialists who work in the company make me feel proud of belonging to the staff." • "Knowing that something was wrong and I helped solve it." • "I've been part of this company since its golden days, when we worked for love, without measuring efforts. I feel proud to be part of this family."	Be part of the family; Largest IT Company in Latin America; Reputable company; Proud; Help solve problems; Generate well-developed products.
Harmonious labor relations	22%	• "Good relationship and cooperation between co-workers." • "Harmony among co-workers." • "The friendly atmosphere among colleagues." • "Interaction among co-workers." • "The spirit of fellowship and the generally relaxed atmosphere."	Cooperative team; Friendly atmosphere; Spirit of companionship; Harmony; Good relationship.
Social relevance of work and opportunity to develop skills	19%	• "I work in a public company whose main objective is to improve citizens' lives through technological solutions that improve the provision of public services." • "The possibility of learning new technologies." • "To participate in a project that adds value to Brazilian society." • "The acquisition of new knowledge in my area of expertise."	To acquire new knowledge; Learn new technologies; Add value to society; Social good; Projects relevant to society and citizens; Professional growth.
Stability and benefits	14	• "Job security, the right salary at the end of the month, the benefits I have every month that are available to me." • "The benefits, such as: food voucher, health plan, and social allowance." • "Guaranteed salary at the end of the month and some stability compared to the private market."	Job security; Benefits; Stability; Health Plan, Food Voucher; Salary on time.
Do what you like for work	13	• "Satisfaction in performing my tasks, which I do with pleasure. I love my work! I do it with love, dedication, and quality." • "I like what I do, I come to work with joy and willingness to perform my tasks." • I like to do what I do. If I couldn't do this activity, I would feel bad."	Sense of achievement; Satisfaction; Pleasure; Happiness.
Comfortable working conditions	8	• "The physical environment is always neat and tidy. The tools are right for the job." • "The facilities are modern and comfortable." • "To work in a clean, comfortable environment with ergonomic equipment always available."	Comfortable workplace; Pleasant environment; Modern facilities; Proper Cleaning, Lighting, and Furniture.

DISCUSSION

The results revealed the perceptions of workers of a public company about aspects that provide well-being and ill-being in their work contexts and that impact their quality of work life. The core theme "bureaucratic labor organization" – with the highest percentage of sentences produced – demonstrates a problem that seems to be commonplace in the Brazilian public context. On the one hand, there is a high level of pressure for quality work. On the other hand, workers perceive excessive norms, rework, slowness, and lack of flexibility. Studies have shown the negative impacts of work organization on well-being: Daniel (2012) demonstrated the negative consequences of the organization of work demands on the Human Labor Cost (HLC), resulting in the predominance of workplace malaise in the physical, cognitive, and affective dimensions. Considering the organization of work as a constituent element of the Goods and Services Production Context (*Contexto de Produção de Bens e Serviços* [CPBS]; Ferreira & Mendes,

2003) and as the axis of operationalization of the production process that directly impacts the execution of tasks and the ill-being of those who perform them (Albuquerque, 2011; Boisvert, 1980; Daniel, 2012; Ferreira, 2012; Nogueira & Frota, 2011), it is urgent for organizations to develop actions that invest in improvements in the management process.

The analysis of the core theme *inadequate working conditions and stressful commuting* reinforces what has been pointed out in the literature about the importance of investing in work structures that provide the necessary support to perform the activities and avoid occupational illness. In the studies by Medeiros (2012) and Feitosa (2010), working conditions proved to be the main source of workplace malaise. Regarding home-work-home journey, long-standing workers' complaint and causes of work-related accidents (commuting), this result seems to suggest that the problem has worsened in recent decades, especially in the large Brazilian metropolitan areas.

Survey participants also stressed the wear and tear suffered in the commuting between home and work, which often affects, due to the long time away from home, the necessary balance between social life and work. In this sense, management strategies that have been implemented in various organizations – such as a flexible approach to working hours and/or place of work – seem to be a way of intervention, as they can enable workers to minimize the impacts of traffic stress and to better manage aspects of their personal lives (Gisin et al., 2016; Ourives, 2013; Silva, 2009; Zerbini et al., 2009). A study by Sardeshmukh et al. (2012) pointed out as positive effects of the home office, the decrease of pressure and conflict between roles and the increase of autonomy. However, Golden et al. (2008) identified feelings of loneliness, irritability, and guilt as impacts of this type of work. In this sense, it is prudent to be very careful because there is still a lack of scientific evidence on the effects and implementation of home office and flexibility at work to more safely evaluate its real gains for individuals, organizations, and society.

Regarding the core theme *conflicting relationships and unequal treatment*, we highlight the role of healthy socio-professional relationships as a major factor in organizational contexts, as social work relations centered on cooperation, respect, and trust tend to be perceived by workers as sources of well-being at work (Brusch & Monteiro, 2011; Mendes et al., 2003; Pizzio & Klein, 2015; Schulte & Vainio, 2010).

The core themes *downgrading of technical merit*, *lack of appreciation and recognition by society* and *injustice and iniquity* bring similarities and interfaces between them, and have in their origin the feeling of injustice that impacts the perception of devaluation that can lead to employee illness, disbelief, and demotivation (Maia, 2014). Andrade (2011) identified a strong sense of injustice among Brazilian federal justice workers, showing the dialectic of the relationship between servants and the demand to serve justice and, at the same time, perceiving injustice in labor relations. In this sense, developing fair, meritocratic policies for appointing positions of trust can minimize the damage of this factor.

With regard to the core theme *lack of professional growth perspective*, we highlight a limitation that is inherent to public service primarily due to the legal regime to which the workers are bound. Career immobility undermines growth expectations and may enhance feelings of ill-being at work. According to Ferreira (2017), for professional growth to be effective, it is necessary to invest in recognition practices. Bendassoli (2012) points out that recognition needs to be integrated with management practices and organizational culture, seeking to equalize the participant work relationship in the search, on the one hand, for productivity and performance growth and, on the other, for the reduction of suffering caused by the lack of recognition.

Finally, we realize that the common thread of ill-being at work in the researched group seems to be more strongly related to aspects of work organization and professional recognition. As already argued, this result has been reproduced in other studies (Albuquerque, 2011; Andrade, 2011; Antloga et al., 2014; Branquinho, 2010; Fernandes, 2013; Figueira, 2014) within the scope of the methodological approach of AEA_QWL.

Regarding well-being, some elements common to other studies in public or private contexts were highlighted. About the core themes *importance and meaningfulness of work*, *do what you like for work* and *social relevance of work and opportunity to develop skills* we highlight meaningfulness of work. Several authors have underlined the central role of work in people's lives, such as Antunes (1999), Bauman (1998), and Sennet (1999). Other studies, whether in public service or the private sector, have also pointed to the meaning of work and its relevance to society and the pride to be part of the institution as a source of well-being at work (Albuquerque, 2011; Andrade , 2011; Costa, 2011; Ferreira, 2012; Figueira, 2014; Morin et al., 2007; Oliveira, 2010; Santos, 2014). In this sense, it is relevant to reflect on the ontological role of work as an element of constitution of citizens and identity construction.

Regarding harmonious working relationships, studies by Albuquerque (2011), Andrade (2011), Branquinho (2010), and Feitosa (2010) pointed out the importance of social relations in the perception of well-being. According to Mendes et al. (2003), adequate labor relations can serve as a strategy to minimize the negative impacts of other work-related aspects, i.e., they act as social support for suffering (Brusch & Monteiro, 2011; Mendes et al., 2003).

The core themes *comfortable working conditions* and *stability and benefits* underscore the importance of investing in appropriate physical working conditions and a good benefit policy. In the organization under study, the physical structure of the building favors the perception of well-being regarding the physical conditions of the work environment (e.g. clean and comfortable environment, adequate furniture). However, building location where access is more difficult was cited as a source of ill-being. This illustrates the dialectical relationship of well-being and ill-being in context, given the contradictory relationship between man and organization and the understanding of well-being and ill-being in a continuum of representations (Ferreira, 2012).

Our results revealed several aspects relevant to the management of the organization, giving concrete direction to the formulation and implementation of strategies for strengthening the elements that generate well-being at work, as well as facing the causes or potentializers of ill-being. Building policies for people based on the perceptions of those who work in a given organization seems to be a pertinent way in the pursuit of promoting quality of work life. Therefore, our findings provide subsidies for the reflection on the relations of well-being and ill-being at work and the organizational effectiveness advocated in the strategic objectives of the studied organization.

We highlight what seems to be the main contribution of the study: to look for clues that allow, from the academic point of view, the improvement of the theory on the topic and, from the organizations' point of view, the construction of people management policies that can be effective. According to Martins and Molinaro (2013):

> Looking forward to the new reality of the world of work implies discussing equity in the processes that shape the field of labor management, namely: access and nature of jobs, social protection, remuneration, work environment and conditions, qualification, participation politics, and access to technology. (p. 1669)

The incipient number of studies on well-being and ill-being at work made it difficult for us to carry out comparative analyses to compare our results with the literature. Moreover, the lack of consensus in the literature about the constructs was also a hindering element in this process by restricting deeper theoretical analyses on the subject.

It is noteworthy that other investigations can be conducted through the present investigation. A possible perspective for the present study is the deepening of issues on work organization, which has been a structuring axis of quality of work life, and is a variable responsible for enhancing feelings of well-being and work discomfort. We also suggest conducting studies that seek to analyze the strengthening of socio-professional relationships as an operative mediation strategy to compensate for the wear and tear caused by other organizational factors.

Taking this scenario of change as a reference, the general objective of this research was to map the main sources of well-being and ill-being at work based on the perceptions of workers in a Brazilian public company. In addition, we provide clues that may signal paths for the search for well-being at work in the studied organizational context.

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