

Science and Ethical Conflicts in the Management of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Ciência e Conflitos Éticos na Gestão da Pandemia da COVID-19

Ciencia y Conflictos Éticos en el Manejo de la Pandemia COVID-19

Understanding the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on people's health and on production processes, given its extent, is still provisional. It is clear, however, that the pandemic will leave a significant legacy in people's lives, such as lower economic growth, employability crises, efforts to maintain income, changes in work designs and routines and persistent health problems (Cruz et al., 2020).

Successive waves of increased infections over the past few months have limited production demands and prolonged the economic crisis in different countries. In addition, an increase in psychosocial, environmental and economic risks is observed, with important impacts on people's health and integrity, such as negative or derogatory feelings (eg: guilt, anger, shame), stress symptoms, of anxiety and mood disorders (Čartolovni, Stolt, Scott, & Suhonen, 2021). In fact, there is already an expectation of changes in physical and psychological health in view of the biological threat and the crisis in the provision of emergency care (Hines, Chin, Glick, & Wickwire, 2021).

Fortunately, the development and dissemination of vaccines against COVID-19 in the population has pointed out prospects for an exit from the health and labor crisis, as well as providing encouragement to overcome the legacy of social and educational problems resulting from the pandemic (International Labor Organization, 2020). In this context, the need to return to face-to-face activities is emphasized, although it is true that within telework and all variations of teleservice, covering various occupations, measures to restrict mobility, and social distancing have been intensified (Figueiredo, Ribeiro, Pereira, & Passos, 2021).

Reviewing the adversities faced in similar situations in the past and reflecting on the lessons to be drawn for the future are important aspects to be considered regarding the advancement of the civilizing process and the alignment of perspectives on post-pandemic action. In a globally connected world, particularly in the 21st century, and in view of the emergence of a serious public health crisis, there are also uncertainties and insecurities in the process of understanding the nature of the crisis and its consequences, as well as building consensual arguments and promoting solutions to change it.

Two aspects of the management of the current pandemic crisis have received attention: a) the role of science, scientific research, and technologies derived from them in generating guidelines and solutions for controlling the pandemic and its effects on people's health; b) the emergence of ethical conflicts from managing the economic and human resources required to meet the needs of the population, as well as disseminating information and solutions to face the problems generated by the pandemic, which are often fragile or incompatible with the

options for effective operationalization.

The COVID-19 pandemic has given rise to a set of specialized scientific knowledge, management methods, and technologies which assist with controlling the pandemic, in order to reduce the speed of contamination and the effects of infection by the Sars-CoV-2 virus and its variations. Science and scientists have been tested to exhaustion in this health crisis. Furthermore, considering recent history, we are probably facing one of the most critical situations of confrontation with scientific knowledge, submitted on a daily basis to the limits of credibility and validity of its assumptions and conclusions. The wide dissemination of technical and scientific studies during the pandemic, many of them embryonic, controversial, and some of them refuted in sequenced studies - something that is part of the *modus operandi* of the scientific world - contributed to generating distrust among many people in the institutions that produce and execute scientific guidelines, hindering consensus towards and adherence to protocols to combat the pandemic.

Scientific credibility is based on the capacity of science and the knowledge produced by its researchers to be recognized as being valuable to society. Although they may be fallible, scientific production and products can be trusted, given the broad spectrum of their historical contributions to people's health and well-being. However, scientific knowledge must also be recognized as being valid. Furthermore, scientific validity is generally achieved with rigorous studies, where hypotheses and their effects in real situations are tested and confronted over time.

The efforts produced by the scientific community and its professionals, in fact, contributed decisively to controlling the pandemic and reducing the negative outcomes of COVID-19. The legacy of the pandemic allows us to affirm that these efforts will continue, probably in a more coordinated way and guided by new perspectives of technological innovations to face similar crises. It is also likely that the credibility and validity of science will remain in evidence and debate long after the pandemic.

From the standpoint of the management of the pandemic and its effects, the role of the Brazilian Unified Health System (*Sistema Único de Saúde* - SUS) and the entire state apparatus for providing healthcare to the population should be highlighted. The results of the collective immunization process in Brazil indicate a need to strengthen the public healthcare network, but at the same time to show the importance of the SUS in its distributive capacity for care, especially for the most socioeconomically vulnerable and in regions with greater difficulty regarding access. However, it is also worth emphasizing the role of organizations in the production and service sectors, supplementary health institutions, and schools and universities, in the creation of guidelines and contingency

plans for COVID-19.

The extended crisis scenario and limited resources throughout the COVID-19 pandemic led to ethical conflicts in the management of the physical and financial structure of state institutions and their relations with private entities, as well as national and local procedures and dissemination of measures to contain the spread of the pandemic and attention to the population. Ethical conflicts arise when, in certain situations, a choice or decision must be made between following personal principles or values and assuming collective interests or current social norms. In other words, ethical conflicts are situated between the right and the duty to act, judged from a moral point of view (Rainer, Schneider, & Lorenz, 2018).

The emergence of ethical conflicts in the management of the COVID-19 pandemic was observed at different levels of coverage. A proportion of them focused on the allocation of resources to fight the pandemic and its effects, in view of the need to acquire and make available a significant volume of materials and equipment, primarily aimed at treating people, and the need for financing the acquisition or production of the vaccine. Otherwise, ethical conflicts could be observed in the definition of the main guidelines to contain the spread of Sars-CoV-2, in institutional or media communication of measures with greater or lesser effectiveness in infection control, in the relocation of health professionals, for emergency or regional interests, and prioritizing care for specific populations and patients.

The consequences of mismanaging these ethical conflicts have generated a lack of infrastructure for public and private care and hospital beds, the rationing of equipment and drugs to treat the infected, the lack of tests to detect the pathogen, and the insufficiency of resources to produce or purchase vaccines. All these aspects accentuated the conditions of social vulnerability and the impacts of COVID-19 on people's health and work (Freitas, Napimoga, & Donalisio, 2020).

Faced with ethical conflicts between personal interest or value, and collective interest or norms, it is important to reflect on the quality of the performance of authorities, managers and professionals, especially in crisis situations, as in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this sense, it is considered essential to link decision processes to the central principles of Bioethics, namely: *autonomy* (capacity to deliberate on their choices according to available resources); *beneficence* (maximizing the benefit and minimizing the harm, in view of the decisions taken); *non-maleficence* (not causing or causing the least possible harm to people), and *justice* (giving each person their due, in view of agreed norms) (Lee, 2017; Smith & Upshur, 2020).

In any case, ethical and, therefore, also moral conflicts, generated during the COVID-19 pandemic, promoted an intense discussion on the role of science and the capacity of public and private institutions to generate useful information and solutions that favor the common good, to the detriment of private interests. One of the clear consequences of the management of COVID-19, is the need to discuss the relationship of commitments between state and society and the confrontation of ethical problems generated by valuing personal interests at the expense of the public interest.

The COVID-19 pandemic proved to be a significant opportunity for reflection on self-imposed changes and those that require management, whether at a personal, family or organizational level. It has been a period of effusive manifestations of beliefs and arguments, uncertainties and deliberations, actions and conflicts, interests and compromises. The rPOT follows its main guideline of disseminating, through its publications, scientific contributions and professional practices about the world of work and organizations, especially those involving psychological

and psychosocial processes. In this issue, we also continue with empirical studies on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on work, health, and organizational processes.

rPOT, throughout this pandemic, has encouraged scientific production on the repercussions of the epidemic in the world of work and organizations, its challenges and perspectives. Some of these researches can be found in recent publications on occupational risks, stressors at work, support and mental health at work (Cortez, Cordeiro Júnior, & Medeiros-Costa, 2021; Freitas & Mourão, 2020; Tomasi, Rissi, & Pauli, 2020). rPOT follows its main guideline of disseminating, through its publications, scientific contributions and professional practices about the area of work and organizations, especially the ones involving psychological and psychosocial processes, such as those found in this issue.

Finally, we are pleased to announce that rPOT, considered the most important scientific journal in its field in Latin America, was cited in the Historical Perspectives in Industrial and Organizational Psychology (Feitosa & Sim, 2021) as one of the most important periodicals in the world in the field of Psychology of Organizations and Work. rPOT, linked to the Brazilian Association of Organizational and Work Psychology (*Associação Brasileira de Psicologia Organizacional e do Trabalho* - SBPOT), has gained international recognition for its history of scientific and professional contributions.

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