

**Special Section “Work and Health in the Face of Contemporary Metamorphoses”**

## Well-being, malaise, and quality of working life management

**Mário César Ferreira<sup>1</sup>, Letícia A. Santos<sup>1</sup>, and Tatiane Paschoal<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Department of Social and Work Psychology, University of Brasília [Universidade de Brasília (UnB)]

<sup>2</sup> Department of Administration, University of Brasília [Universidade de Brasília (UnB)]

**Received:** April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

**Accepted:** June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

**Section editors:** Cleverson Pereira de Almeida and Josep Maria Blanch.

### Authors' notes

Mário César Ferreira  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4962-5154>

Letícia A. Santos  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8776-8981>

Tatiane Paschoal  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2688-1411>

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Mário César Ferreira at SHDB, CD do Lago Sul, cj. C, casa 28, Brasília, DF, Brazil. CEP 71676-250. E-mail: ferreiramariocesar@gmail.com

### Abstract

The issue of quality of working life (QWL) has assumed social and corporate relevance due to the worsening of harmful indicators for the health and safety of workers and the scope of the organizational mission. The research aimed to highlight the structuring representations of well-being and malaise at work by servants of a public organization seeking to contribute to the sustainable management of QWL. A total of 1,110 civil servants of an executive branch of the Federal District, in Brazil, participated in the survey. Data were collected based on two open questions from the qualitative part of the Quality of Working Life Assessment Inventory (QWL-AI) and were analyzed using the *Interface de R pour les Analyses Multidimensionnelles de Textes et de Questionnaires* (IRaMuTeQ) application. The results pointed to three discourse structuring thematic nuclei for work well-being (having a good relationship with colleagues, doing a job you like, and feeling useful to society) and malaise at work (work overload, lack of recognition, time pressure, and rework). Therefore, sustainable management of QWL must be anchored in people management practices that foster professional development, the alignment between tasks, roles, and organizational mission, highlighting the social contributions, the recognition of the worker by their superiors, peers, and society, and the review of work organization, focusing on the reassessment of work processes, distribution of demands, and ways of setting and demanding goals.

**Keywords:** work well-being, malaise at work, people management, quality of working life, public sector

### BEM-ESTAR, MAL-ESTAR E GERENCIAMENTO DE QUALIDADE DE VIDA NO TRABALHO

#### Resumo

A questão da qualidade de vida no trabalho (QVT) tem relevância social e corporativa diante do agravamento de indicadores nocivos para a saúde e a segurança dos trabalhadores e o alcance da missão organizacional. Esta pesquisa objetivou evidenciar as representações estruturantes das vivências de bem-estar e mal-estar no trabalho por servidores de uma organização pública visando a contribuir para o gerenciamento sustentável de QVT. Participaram da pesquisa 1.110 servidores de um órgão do poder executivo do Distrito Federal, no Brasil. Os dados foram coletados com base em duas questões abertas da parte qualitativa do Inventário de Avaliação de Qualidade de Vida no Trabalho (IA-QVT) e foram analisados com o aplicativo *Interface de R pour les Analyses Multidimensionnelles de Textes et de Questionnaires* (IRaMuTeQ). Os resultados apontaram três núcleos temáticos estruturadores do discurso para bem-estar no trabalho (relacionamento com colegas, trabalho de que gosta e sensação de utilidade à sociedade) e mal-estar no trabalho (sobrecarga de trabalho, falta de reconhecimento, pressão temporal e retrabalho). A gestão sustentável de QVT, portanto, deve estar ancorada em práticas de gestão de pessoas que fomentem o investimento no desenvolvimento dos profissionais, o alinhamento das tarefas e papéis com a missão organizacional, evidenciando a conexão com as contribuições sociais, o reconhecimento do trabalhador por superiores, pares e sociedade, a revisão da organização do trabalho, com foco na reavaliação de processos de trabalho, distribuição de demandas e formas de estabelecimento e cobrança de resultados.

**Palavras-chave:** bem-estar no trabalho, mal-estar no trabalho, gestão de pessoas, qualidade de vida no trabalho, setor público

### BIENESTAR, MALESTAR Y GESTIÓN DE LA CALIDAD DE VIDA EN EL TRABAJO

#### Resumen

La calidad de vida en el trabajo (CVT) ha adquirido relevancia social y corporativa debido al agravamiento de indicadores nocivos para la salud y la seguridad de los trabajadores y el logro de la misión organizacional. El objetivo de la investigación ha sido conocer las representaciones estructurantes del bienestar y del malestar en el trabajo desde el punto de vista de trabajadores de una organización pública con vistas a contribuir a la gestión sostenible de la CVT. Participaron en la encuesta 1.110 funcionarios de una organización del Poder Ejecutivo del Distrito Federal, de Brasil. Los datos se recolectaron mediante dos preguntas abiertas de la parte cualitativa del Inventario de Evaluación de la Calidad de Vida Laboral (IE-CVT) y se analizaron con la ayuda del software *Interface de R pour les Analyses Multidimensionnelles de Textes et de Questionnaires* (IRaMuTeQ). Los resultados indicaron tres núcleos temáticos de estructuración del discurso para el bienestar en trabajo (relación con compañeros de trabajo, hacer un trabajo que le gusta, sentirse útil para la sociedad) y para el malestar en el trabajo (sobrecarga de trabajo, falta de reconocimiento, presión temporal y retrabajo). Por lo tanto, la gestión sostenible de la CVT debe estar fundamentada en prácticas de gestión de personas que promovan el desarrollo de los profesionales, el alineamiento entre tareas, papeles y la misión organizacional, evidenciando la conexión con las contribuciones sociales, el reconocimiento social de jefes, compañeros y sociedad, la revisión de la organización del trabajo, con enfoque en la revaluación de procesos de trabajo, distribución de demandas y formas de negociación y cobro de resultados.

**Palabras clave:** bienestar en el trabajo, malestar en el trabajo, gestión de personas, calidad de vida laboral, sector público

The quality of working life (QWL) field is marked by a wide variety of theoretical-methodological models and organizational practices. This construct is complex, dynamic, and fundamentally based on the interaction of workers with their organizational context. The common ground in this field refers precisely to well-being as a central component in QWL studies and programs and their respective indicators and definitions (Martel & Dupuis, 2006). The present study sought to highlight the empirical results of research on the structuring representations of well-being and malaise at work by workers of a public organization in order to contribute – based on the literature review – to the sustainable management of QWL.

To articulate the phenomena approached here, it is necessary to present and discuss the context in which the topic is to be found, as well as the conceptual and operational basis of well-being and malaise at work and their relationship with management practices in organizations.

Regarding the context in which the topic is found, we highlight the evolutive changes in organizational and management practices, made possible mainly by advances in information and communication technologies, which enhanced organizational agility and shaped the way we can work (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020; Iannotta et al., 2020) in corporations. New ways to define and describe work have emerged, raising reflections on who is working, where, and how. Information technologies increase the opportunity for flexibility and autonomy of professionals in the organization they work for, although, at the same time, raise to an unprecedented level the electronic control and monitoring of the worker, the workload, the physical and cognitive costs, distress, insecurity, and the so-called precariousness of working conditions and relationships (Guerci et al., 2019; Kowalski & Loretto, 2017; Massimo, 2017).

With the coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic, the interfaces between the changes in the world of work and the well-being of workers solidify and gain new life. Both organizations and professionals have suffered different impacts due to the need for urgent adaptations (Petrillo et al., 2021) and, at the individual level, it is possible to observe developments in health and well-being arising, among other variables, from an increase in work overload, the invasion of work tasks during rest time, the intensification of work-family conflicts, and the insecurity generated by an unprecedented crisis (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020; Ferreira & Falcão, 2020).

Before rapid changes and challenges, the study and application of practices capable of sustaining and promoting the well-being of workers are an urgent responsibility of people management specialists (Guerci et al., 2019; Guest, 2017; Kowalski & Loretto, 2017). Well-being at work has a direct and indirect relationship with the worker's general health and the organizational results, and it builds a foundation for excellence and governance in organizations (Kowalski & Loretto, 2017; Nangov & Indrianti, 2018).

In this scenario, QWL consolidates as a more relevant phenomenon than just a postindustrial trend. Understanding and promoting well-being at work are elements that crossed the agenda of academic researchers, organizational managers, and public policymakers. Diagnosing well-being and intervening in it requires mitigating the sources of stress and physical and

mental exhaustion – or even malaise in a broader sense – and promoting positive experiences in the organizational context (Demo & Paschoal, 2016; Guerçi et al., 2019). Well-being and malaise at work, therefore, are variables that complement each other in the measurement and monitoring of QWL.

One might ask what well-being and malaise at work consist of currently. Both phenomena present a variety of concepts and operationalizations, but some assumptions achieved consensus in the current specialized literature. The first involves the multidimensionality of these constructs (Demo & Paschoal, 2016; Diener et al., 2010; Guerçi et al., 2019; Guest, 2017; Mark et al., 2019; Warr, 2013). The second refers to the need to consider clearly positive experiences when talking about well-being and not only the absence of negative experiences, such as stress and burnout (Demo & Paschoal, 2016; Huppert & So, 2013; Warr, 2013). The third consensus refers to the comparison between positive and negative experiences and the predominance of the former over the latter, as both coexist in people's daily lives (Demo & Paschoal, 2016; Warr, 2013).

In terms of the operationalization of well-being and malaise at work, the positive and negative affects, expressed through emotions and humors, are present in most of the measures adopted in field research (Demo & Paschoal, 2016; Guerçi et al., 2019; Oerlemans & Bakker, 2018; Warr, 2013). The use of instruments that measure experiences of personal accomplishment or flourishing has also been expressive (Demo & Paschoal, 2016; Guerçi et al., 2019; Mark et al., 2019; Oerlemans & Bakker, 2018; Warr, 2013).

According to the approach of activity-centered ergonomics applied to the quality of working life (ACE-QWL), on which the present study is theoretically supported, well-being is defined as positive emotions and humors that stem from situations experienced by individuals while performing tasks. The manifestation of well-being at work is characterized by the experience of emotions/humors that occur, more frequently, in the following modalities: joy, disposition, contentment, enthusiasm, happiness, excitement, pride, and tranquility (Ferreira, 2017).

Based on the same approach, malaise at work is, in turn, defined as negative emotions and humors that arise from situations experienced by the individual while performing tasks. The manifestation of malaise at work is characterized by the experience of emotions/humors that occur more frequently in the following modalities: irritation, depression, boredom, annoyance, impatience, worry, anxiety, frustration, disturbance, nervousness, tension, anger, and fear (Ferreira, 2017). The lasting experience of positive emotions and humors by workers constitutes a health promotion factor in work situations and indicates the presence of QWL, while the lasting experience of negative emotions and humors by workers constitutes a risk factor for health in work situations and indicates the absence of QWL (Ferreira, 2017).

Both well-being and malaise at work are phenomena at the individual level, stemming from multifactorial contradictions experienced by individuals in work-related situations. According to Ferreira (2017), the recurring manifestation, the prevailing character, and the lasting experience of well-being at work delineate a scenario arising from a sustainable QWL that

positively affects individuals (e.g., health), the operation of organizations (better performance), and the society (customer satisfaction and users of public services). In turn, the recurring manifestation, the prevailing character, and the lasting experience of malaise at work delineate a typical scenario that arises from the precariousness or absence of QWL, thus increasing the risk of the emergence of several critical indicators that negatively affect individuals (e.g., errors, rework, illness, accidents), the performance in the execution of tasks, the operation of organizations (e.g., absenteeism), and the society (social security costs). Malaise at work is a risk or possibility inherent in the adaptive process that characterizes the work activity of individuals *vis-à-vis* the demands present in the work environment and the effective capacities or personal limits of workers to respond to such requirements efficiently and effectively.

The experiences and personal management of well-being and malaise at work are influenced by individual (health status, personal and professional characteristics), organizational (organizational culture, organizational and work management model, conditions, organization, and socio-professional work relationships), and situational (variability, diversity, dynamics, unpredictability of events that interfere with daily activities) factors. In general, when these experiences are approached in the organizational context, the work variables themselves stand out as moderate or strong antecedents (Demo & Paschoal, 2016; Guerci et al., 2019; Guest, 2017).

It is worth mentioning that the specific case of well-being consists essentially of positive experiences, characterized by pleasure, satisfaction, and search for personal fulfillment and expression through professional activities (Demo & Paschoal, 2016; Huppert & So, 2013; Warr, 2013). By concentrating complex and several socio-professional relations, tasks, goals, performance expectations, and results, the corporate environment should also provide the opportunity for well-being at work to manifest itself. The configuration of context variables and their representations will indicate whether the organization, in fact, fulfills this potential. Suppose the process and consequences of the human cost at work can explain almost completely the roots and manifestations of malaise. In that case, other antecedents and processes also need to be rescued to understand well-being at work. Thus, well-being and malaise, despite complementarity, are not exactly two sides of the same coin (Demo & Paschoal, 2016). Listing the sources of malaise and acting on them do not mean that there will necessarily be an increase in well-being at work. Exploring the sources of well-being and malaise separately in a diagnosis allows us to describe a more complete panorama and indicators for an effective QWL program.

Regarding the interventions and practices related to well-being and malaise at work, most of them focus on the individual level and, therefore, address ways in which the worker themselves understands these experiences and manages them. Well-being and malaise at work are, in fact, phenomena of individual nature, but their antecedents go far beyond individual characteristics and traits. Kowalski and Loretto (2017) emphasize that this is not a matter of removing the importance of this individual focus, but of exploring, delving into, and addressing context and organizational variables, thus outlining a more holistic approach. In this sense,

people management practices seem to play an essential role in the experiences of well-being and malaise at work (Demo & Paschoal, 2016; Guerçi et al., 2019; Guest, 2017; Mark et al., 2019).

Based on a review of theoretical models about mental health, well-being, and QWL, Guest (2017) listed five sets of managerial practices that potentially and primarily promote well-being at work: a) investment in professionals (promotion of personal and professional development, organizational support for trainings, and career development); b) practices to promote engagement (autonomy in carrying out tasks, dissemination of information, and feedback); c) positive physical and social environment (safety practices at work, justice, equity, respect in the treatment of professionals); d) practices that promote the participation of professionals in the decision-making (committees, representative councils, and events/channels to express opinions); and e) organizational support (managerial support and aspects of work organization, such as flexible work schedule and work-family balance arrangements). Guerçi et al. (2019) warn of the importance of approaching the entire system of people management practices in organizations, not only isolated practices. Currently, a strategic management of people is only possible when their different policies and practices are interrelated, complementary, and planned within a broader strategic scope.

In this complex interface between a changing context, well-being at work, malaise at work, and managerial practices, the search for sustainable management of QWL is relevant and urgent. The present study aimed to highlight the structuring representations of well-being and malaise at work, especially in the public sector, and sought to contribute to the sustainable management of QWL and effective policies and QWL programs. The results bring insights and information for people managers.

## Method

The present study is an excerpt of a larger empirical research of quantitative and qualitative nature, carried out in the second semester of 2020, on the perception of public servants from an executive branch of the Federal District about QWL and sources of well-being and malaise at work. Regarding the research design, it can be considered a case study of descriptive type (Flick et al., 2000). The description of the method below enables the contextualization of the phenomenon for a better understanding of the results obtained.

## Participants

All institution employees were invited to participate in the research (census method). To invite them, the main strategies adopted were lectures, e-mails, e-cards, banners, e-flyers, videos, and releases in internal information channels. One thousand, one hundred, and ten (49.1%) out of the total of 2,260 employees of the public sector institution participated in the research. The demographic and professional profile of the participants presented the following characteristics: balance between males and females (50.1% and 49.4%, respectively); mean age of 44.5 years (CV = 23.77%); 60.0% were married; 45.9% with specialization diplomas; the average job

tenure was 11.2 years ( $CV = 91.07\%$ ); the average time in the current department was 5.39 years ( $CV = 131.72\%$ ); and more than 16 years on average working in the public service ( $CV = 67.5\%$ ).

## Instruments

We used the digital version of the Quality of Working Life Assessment Inventory (QWL-AI) (Ferreira, 2017). This quantitative and qualitative instrument enables the diagnosis of QWL in organizational contexts based on workers' representations.

The quantitative part of the inventory is composed on 61 items distributed across three scales, namely "Work Context" ( $\alpha = 0.96$ ), "Management Practices" ( $\alpha = 0.74$ ), and "Feelings at Work" ( $\alpha = 0.94$ ), which conceptually structure QWL according to the respondents' perspective.

The scale "Work Context" assesses the representations of workers related to QWL based on five factors: working conditions ( $\alpha = 0.89$  – example of item: "The existing furniture in the workplace is adequate"), work organization ( $\alpha = 0.81$  – example of item: "I can do my job without work overload"), socio-professional relationships ( $\alpha = 0.86$  – example of item: "There is trust among colleagues"), recognition and professional growth ( $\alpha = 0.92$  – example of item: "At the [institution], the results obtained through my work are recognized"), and use of information technology ( $\alpha = 0.86$  – example of item: "In the systems I use, data/information is often lost").

The scale "Management Practices" expresses the representation of workers regarding the usual management mode that exists in the organizational context. This inventory dimension is composed of six items (e.g., "I participate in decisions about the organization of tasks"). The scale "Feelings at Work" is composed of three dimensions: positive affect ( $\alpha = 0.95$  – example of item: "In the last six months, my work has made me happy"), negative affect ( $\alpha = 0.94$  – example of item: "In the last six months, my work has made me frustrated"), and strain in the workplace ( $\alpha = 0.68$  – example of item: "Work impairs the use of my free time when I'm not at the [institution]").

The qualitative part of the inventory is composed of four open-ended questions: "1) In my opinion, Quality of Working Life is..."; "2) When I think about my job at [institution], what causes me the most malaise is ..."; "3) When I think about my job at [institution], what makes me feel good is..."; and "4) Comments and suggestions".

Moreover, we applied ten other questions regarding the demographic and socio-professional profile to better characterize the sample. In this study, we only used the open-ended questions 2 and 3 because we focused on highlighting the structuring representations of well-being and malaise at work.

## Procedures

First, a conceptual and methodological alignment of the QWL approach was carried out for the directors of the institution investigated. An in-house Working Group (WG) with expertise in the aforementioned topic was formally established to monitor all research-related activities. In this case, the responsibilities of the WG and researchers were described, and the strategic

committee was also formalized to act in the formulation of the QWL policy and program according to the outcomes of the research, regulated by a specific decree of the institution. After formalizations were carried out and the Research Action Plan was established, we started a campaign to raise awareness on the target audience of the importance of the research and to build trust in the relationship.

QWL-AI was hosted on a website external to the institution and applied online to ensure greater participation of the target audience and increase the reliability of responses and information security. From an ethical point of view, the research was conducted based on the Resolution No. 510 of April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2016 (Brasil, 2016), which eliminates the need to submit it to the Research Ethics Committees of the National Research Ethics Committee (Comitês de Ética em Pesquisa da Comissão Nacional de Ética em Pesquisa [CEP-Conep]) system when the research refers to an opinion survey with unidentified participants, databanks with aggregate information (without the possibility of individual identification), and research focused on in-depth knowledge of situations that emerge spontaneously and contingently in professional practice without, however, identifying individuals nor organizations. In addition to this formal ethical characteristic of the research, steps were taken to ensure the respondents about confidentiality and ethical information. The authors are fully responsible for the data (Brasil, 2016).

The participants received a link to access the instrument by e-mail. In the first screen of access, participants were presented with clarifications about the nature of the research and information about the ethical principles embedded in voluntary participation in scientific research, such as confidentiality and anonymous survey, guarantee of anonymity, and possibility of withdrawal without causing personal risks nor harm to the organization. After reading the instructions on the instrument's initial screen, the respondent should click on "I agree to participate" (equivalent to an electronic signature of informed consent), thus enabling access to entering personal codes to respond to the survey.

To analyze the answers given by the participants to the two open-ended questions of the QWL-AI, we used the IRaMuTeQ (*Interface de R pour les Analyses Multidimensionnelles de Textes et de Questionnaires*) software (Ratnaud, 2009). Considering the calculations and the most characteristic text excerpts of each class presented by the software, it was possible to describe each of the Discourse Structuring Thematic Cores (DSTC). The results of this analysis indicated three DSTC related to the question "When I think about my job at [institution], what makes me feel good is..." and three DSTC related to the question "When I think about my job at [institution], what causes me the most malaise is...".

## Results

The participation of the respondents in the open-ended questions was expressive, considering that filling in the forms was optional: 996 (44.07%) of the total number of workers at the institution during the data collection answered the question about well-being and 896 (39.64%) answered the question about malaise at work. The freedom and space to answer



allowed the participants to give more visibility to their representations about the organizational context in which they were inserted and, above all, identify the main sources of well-being and malaise at work.

The analysis of the reports enabled the creation of an explanatory scenario composed of three DSTC that organize the collective conception of workers in relation to the sources of well-being and malaise at work, respectively. These DSTC presented both quantitative and qualitative information, identified by IRaMuTeQ, which form the empirical basis for understanding the challenges in the sustainable management of well-being and malaise at work. Through the set of results, it was possible to identify the essential words in Portuguese that compose the three DSTC and characterize the respondents' representation of well-being and malaise at work, as shown in Figures 1 and 2. Regarding the open-ended question "When I think about my job at [institution], what causes me the most well-being is...", the three DSTC that explain the respondents' representations in relation to the sources of well-being at work identified by IRaMuTeQ are: "Having a good relationship with colleagues" (corresponding to 48%); "Doing a job you like" (corresponding to the discourse of 30% of the participants); and "Feeling useful to society" (corresponding to 22% of the participants' discourse).

In the specific DSTC "Having a good relationship with colleagues" (48%), the respondents linked collaboration, interaction, and harmonious coexistence among colleagues to well-being at work. The representative excerpts of such core are [emphasis added]:

**Collaboration** with colleagues and **integration** into the work environment. It is a **joy to work** in an environment where **happiness and good humor** contribute to carrying out work in a **well-integrated team**.

The **coexistence** with the team and the **good relationship** between co-workers.

The harmonious work environment and **meeting with colleagues**, especially those with **good humor** and that know how to take work in a **lighter way**.

The **coexistence** with co-workers in a **harmonious** way.

The **coexistence and exchange of knowledge** with co-workers.

In the DSTC "Doing a job you like" (30%), the workers affirmed that well-being is related to the job they do, a job they are specialized to do, and the pleasure provided by the activities they perform. The most representative excerpts of this core are [emphasis added]:

The **work** I do. I really enjoy **producing**, but I'm enjoying **working remotely** even more. My production has increased a lot.

I **really like** what I do **as** an analyst.

I work with what I like, and I have specialized in **doing my best** for the health and well-being of the other servants at [institution].

I **really like** the **work** I do.

I **like** the **activities** I carry out.

In the DSTC “Feeling useful to society” (22%), it was possible to verify that, according to the respondents, doing a job that impacts the life of society generating value and quality of life for the population is considered an honorable occupation, which produces well-being at work. The representative excerpts of this core are [emphasis added]:

Knowing that I'm in a department responsible for defining **policies, guidelines, and actions** related to the execution of public policies that **will impact citizens' lives**.

Knowing that I am **serving the citizens** of the Federal District and contributing to a better society.

Being a public servant and **serving** the population is an **honorable occupation**.

The certainty that **our work contributes** to the Federal District Government to elaborate documents that reflect the government's performance and, especially, contribute to the definition of **products and services** that seek to **improve the quality of life of the Federal District population**.

A **work** that **generates value for society** as whole.

Figure 1

Main words and expressions from the DSTC about workers' well-being at work



With regard to the open-ended question “When I think about my job at [institution], what causes me the most malaise is...”, IRaMuTeQ identified the following DSTC: “Work overload” (53% of the discourses); “Lack of recognition” (33% of the discourses); and “Time pressure and rework” (14% of the respondents’ discourses).

In the DSTC “Work overload” (53%), the respondents emphasized the mismatch between the amount of work and the necessary people to carry out activities, the feeling of injustice due to the perception that the most dedicated workers are those who receive more demands from managers, the need to work twice as hard to do the work that other colleagues do not do, the lack of personnel, the difficulties faced with the IT department, among others. The most representative excerpts of this core are [emphasis added]:

There is a **large amount of urgent work** that we receive that **overwhelms** the planning. With the implementation of telework, during the pandemic, it was a surprise to see that the work continued to be done in **an even better way**, but **some people do not have what it takes to work like this**.

Many colleagues have **retired**, and their work positions are not being filled. So, there is a **tendency to overload** those who stayed.

Currently, **telework is overloaded** because managers send **more tasks** to the most dedicated servants.

Having **to work twice as hard** because there are **colleagues who are not committed** to their own job and put the **burden** on somebody else’s shoulders.

Spending most of my time trying to solve **IT problems**; if they didn’t exist, I would be able to do **a much better and faster job**.

In the DSTC “Lack of recognition” (33%), the respondents associated malaise at work with the lack of appreciation, the lack of incentives for professional development, the lack of recognition by managers, the granting of functions by kinship instead of competence and technical ability, and the existence of political patronage and protectionism of some careers to the detriment of others. The most representative excerpts of this core are [emphasis added]:

The **lack of appreciation**, incentives, courses/training, recognition, **growth perspective**.

Not having the proper **professional recognition** from my superiors because here functions are granted by **kinship** and not by **competence**.

I perceive an **absence** of meritocracy. There is a lot of **political patronage and protectionism of certain careers** to the detriment of others. Lack of professional recognition. Lack of an impartial and technical analysis to **grant positions and functions**. **Bad** organizational environment in certain departments.

Little **incentive, appreciation, and recognition**. Many non-career appointments are destined to **independent servants** and/or **without technical training**.

**Lack of recognition** of the servant and dispute between careers.

In the DSTC “Time pressure and rework” (14%), the workers emphasized that the short deadlines for carrying out activities, the mismatch of information, and rework have generated malaise at work. The most representative excerpts of this core are [emphasis added]:

Knowing that we have to do things **urgently** in a **short period**, which compromises the **analysis** and **quality** of the work, in addition to increasing the **probability** of **errors**.

Excessive work and **short deadlines** to fulfill certain tasks, which generates **stress**.

Demands with **extremely short deadlines** for execution. Demands that change when the work is almost 100% done. **Mismatch information** from upper management when making requests, causing **rework and accumulation of avoidable errors**.

The large **number of tasks** to be carried out within **short deadlines**, demanding more time than necessary.

**Deficient information technology**, causing a lot of **reworks**.

**Figure 2**  
*Main words and expressions from the DSTC about workers’ malaise at work*



## Discussion

The results obtained in the research bring essential insights based on two interdependent analytical axes. On the one hand, there is the structuring representations of the participants' collective view on the experienced sources of well-being at work and, on the other, the collective representations concerning the experienced sources of malaise at work. They coexist in the daily life (Demo & Paschoal, 2016; Warr, 2013) of the organization under investigation and are at the origin of positive and negative emotions and humors that result from work situations (Ferreira, 2017).

Regarding well-being at the work axis, the results indicate that:

- Three empirical factors constitute well-being at work: good relationship with colleagues, doing a job one likes, and feeling useful to society. In this scenario, it is worth noting the multidimensionality of this construct (Demo & Paschoal, 2016; Diener et al., 2010; Guerçi et al., 2019; Guest, 2017; Mark et al., 2019; Warr, 2013), which, in the case under investigation, combines both individual (enjoying what one does) and organizational contexts (interpersonal relationships), in addition to collective concern (feeling useful to society), which associates with work but focuses on the outside of the organization, indicating a characteristic that transcends classical corporatism.
- The structuring factors of well-being at work are unequivocally related to the organizational context, which indicates that the work variables themselves appear as either moderate or strong antecedents (Demo & Paschoal, 2016; Guerçi et al., 2019; Guest, 2017).
- From an applied perspective, the research findings provide valuable subsidies for managers and multi-professional teams that work in the field of personnel management, and delineate policies (foundations, empirically anchored conceptual frameworks, and values) and the QWL program (projects and continuous flow actions). Investing in strengthening cooperative networking and harmonizing interpersonal relations, for instance, reinforce the good relationship with colleagues and promote sustainable QWL.

Regarding malaise at work, the results indicate:

- The three empirical factors that constitute malaise at work: work overload, lack of recognition, time pressure, and rework. These indicators are already known and have been addressed by other studies (Guerçi et al., 2019; Kowalski & Loretto, 2017; Ferreira, 2017). They are commonly referred to in the health sciences literature and are associated with intensification of work, burnout syndrome, experiences of distress, exhaustion, physical and mental illness, incidents and accidents at work, among others. With the emergence of the pandemic, which established compulsion and predominantly precarious remote work (absence of ergonomic support in the

use of information technologies), the three factors that structure malaise at work have assumed unique contours (e.g., stricter monitoring of remote performance), which, in turn, are impacting the health of workers (Ferreira & Falcão, 2020).

- Research on the QWL field (Ferreira, 2017), anchored in the ACE-QWL, shows that experiences related to work overload, pressure at work, and lack of recognition are strongly present in the worker's reports, as well as complaints related to work.
- Regarding the experiences related to lack of recognition, the results achieved through the application of ACE-QWL point out a very characteristic trait: workers complain that society, generally speaking, does not recognize the importance of their work. To a certain extent, the results of well-being (feeling useful to society) and malaise at work (lack of recognition) seem to lead to the same incongruity or polarity in the representations. At the team level, participatory models that involve good quality and constant feedback amongst professionals are a central issue to support recognition practices. In addition, clear and collectively agreed performance indicators related to both organizational mission and strategy enable servants a sense of belonging and enhance the relevance of work.
- Especially regarding work overload, the assessment and redesign of work processes, the distribution of demands, and the reassessment of the forms of demanding results can contribute to preventing/mitigating malaise experiences, thus contributing to a greater job satisfaction and the effective promotion of sustainable QWL (Ferreira, 2017; Ferreira & Falcão, 2020).

Overall, the findings regarding well-being and malaise at work of this study provide solid empirical basis for the design of a policy and program for quality of working life (PPQWL), thus strengthening the central components supported by other perspectives (Martel & Dupuis, 2006). It is worth noting that the sources of well-being and malaise at work identified in this research are the variables of work itself, which are in accordance with the literature on this topic (Demo & Paschoal, 2016; Guerri et al., 2019; Guest, 2017).

Promoting well-being at work is not enough for the effectiveness of QWL; it is necessary to prevent/mitigate the occurrence of the sources of malaise at work. The sustainable management of QWL in organizations must always take into account the interdependence of both factors. They are directly and indirectly related to workers' health and organizational results and, consequently, lay the foundations for governance excellence in organizations (Kowalski & Loretto, 2017; Nangov & Indrianti, 2018).

The results also have an interface with five sets of practices that potentially and primarily promote well-being at work, as pointed out by Guest (2017), as the case of investment in professionals (promotion of personal and professional development, organizational support for trainings, and career development), which can certainly have a positive impact on fighting

experiences related to lack of recognition, thus positively contributing to mental health and effective QWL.

Finally, it is worth emphasizing that acting preventively on the sources of malaise does not necessarily lead to the development of well-being experiences at work. In this case, it is possible to eliminate/mitigate the risks of illness and accidents for workers, but this does not imply well-being experiences at work. The approaches and practices related to organizational and work management, which are intended to be humanized, cannot do without knowledge of the real sources of well-being and malaise at work if they effectively have an ethical commitment to sustainable QWL.

The present study highlighted the structuring representations of the experiences of well-being and malaise at work by workers of a public organization in order to contribute to a better management of QWL. Based on the findings, the sustainable management of QWL must be anchored in people management practices that encourage investment in the development of professionals, the alignment of tasks and roles with the organizational mission, highlighting the connection with social contributions, the recognition of the worker by their superiors, peers, and society, and the review of the organization of work, focusing on the reassessment of work processes, distribution of demands, and ways of setting and demanding goals.

The descriptive and transversal approach of the study does not allow us to draw causal inferences. In this sense, a research agenda on this topic should include longitudinal studies for the variables addressed here to be analyzed over time. Future studies may include quantitative perceptual and behavioral indicators to enable the testing of relationships and impacts between the variables under investigation. In addition, we suggest the development of applied studies that assess the impact of QWL actions and practices on well-being and malaise at work.

## References

- Brasil. Ministério da Saúde. (2016). *Resolução nº 510, de 7 de abril de 2016*. [https://www.in.gov.br/materia/-/asset\\_publisher/Kujrw0TZC2Mb/content/id/22917581](https://www.in.gov.br/materia/-/asset_publisher/Kujrw0TZC2Mb/content/id/22917581)
- Carnevale, J. B., & Hatak I. (2020). Employee adjustment and well-being in the era of COVID-19: Implications for human resource management. *Journal of Business Research*, 116, 183–187. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.05.037>
- Demo, G., & Paschoal, T. (2016). Well-Being at work scale: Exploratory and confirmatory validation in the USA. *Paidéia*, 26(63), 35–43. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1982-43272663201605>
- Diener, E., Wirtz, D., Tov, W., Kim-Pietro, C., Choi, D.-W., Oishi, S., & Biswas-Diener, R. (2010). New well-being measures: Short scales to assess flourishing and positive and negative feelings. *Social Indicators Research*, 97, 143–156. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-009-9493-y>
- Ferreira, M. C. (2017). *Qualidade de vida no trabalho: Uma abordagem centrada no olhar dos trabalhadores* (3rd ed.). Paralelo 15.
- Ferreira, M. C., & Falcão, J. T. R. (2020). Work in the context of COVID-19 pandemic, mental health and quality of work life: Essential guidelines. In M. M. de Moraes (Org.), *The impacts of the pandemic on workers and their work relationship* (pp. 23–30). Artmed.
- Flick, U., von Kardorff, E., & Steinke, I. (2000). Was ist qualitative Forschung? Einleitung und Überblick. In U. Flick, E. von Kardorff & I. Steinke (Orgs.), *Qualitative Forschung: E in Handbuch* (pp. 13–29). Rowohlt.
- Guerci, M., Hauff, S., & Gilardi, S. (2019). High performance work practices and their associations with health, happiness and relational well-being: Are there any tradeoffs? *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 33(2), 329–359. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2019.1695647>
- Guest, D. E. (2017). Human resource management and employee well-being: Towards a new analytic framework. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 27(1), 22–38. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1748-8583.12139>
- Huppert, F. A., & So, T. T. C. (2013). Flourishing across Europe: Application of a new conceptual framework for defining well-being. *Social Indicators Research*, 110, 837–861. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-011-9966-7>
- Iannotta, M., Meret, C., & Marchetti, G. (2020). Defining leadership in smart working contexts: A concept synthesis. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 556933. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.556933>
- Kowalski, T. H. P., & Loretto, W. (2017). Well-being and HRM in the changing workplace. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 28(16), 2229–2255. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2017.1345205>
- Mark, L., Otake-Ebade, L., & Stewart, J. (2019). The paradox of employee psychological well-being practices: An integrative literature review and new directions for research. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 30(1), 156–187. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2018.1479877>
- Martel, J.-P., & Dupuis, G. (2006). Quality of work life: Theoretical and methodological problems, and presentation of a new model and measuring instrument. *Social Indicators Research*, 77, 333–368. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-004-5368-4>
- Massimo, N. (2017). *Smart working: Una prospettiva critica*. TAO Digital Library. <http://doi.org/10.6092/unibo/amsacta/5717>
- Nangov, R., & Indrianti, S. Y. (2018). Psychological capital, work well-being, and job performance. *International Journal of Engineering & Technology*, 7(4.9), 63–65. <https://doi.org/10.14419/ijet.v7i4.9.20617>
- Oerlemans, W. G. M., & Bakker, A. B. (2018). Motivating job characteristics and happiness at work: A multi-level perspective. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 103(11), 1230–1241. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/apl0000318>



- Petrillo, A., De Felice, F., & Petrillo, L. (2021). Digital divide, skills and perceptions on smart working in Italy: From necessity to opportunity. *Procedia Computer Science*, 180, 913–921. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.procs.2021.01.342>
- Ratinaud, P. (2009). *IRAMUTEQ: Interface de R pour les Analyses Multidimensionnelles de Textes et de Questionnaires* [Computer software]. <http://www.iramuteq.org>
- Warr, P. (2013). Fuentes de felicidad e infelicidad en el trabajo: Una perspectiva combinada. *Revista de Psicología del Trabajo y de las Organizaciones*, 29(3), 99–106. <https://dx.doi.org/10.5093/tr2013a15>

**EDITORIAL BOARD****Editor-in-chief**

Cristiane Silvestre de Paula

**Associated editors**

Alessandra Gotuzo Seabra  
Ana Alexandra Caldas Osório  
Luiz Renato Rodrigues Carreiro  
Maria Cristina Triguero Veloz Teixeira

**Section editors****"Psychological Assessment"**

Alexandre Luiz de Oliveira Serpa  
André Luiz de Carvalho Braule Pinto  
Vera Lúcia Esteves Mateus  
Juliana Burges Sbicigo

**"Psychology and Education"**

Alessandra Gotuzo Seabra  
Carlo Schmidt  
Regina Basso Zanon

**"Social Psychology and Population's Health"**

Enzo Banti Bissoli  
Marina Xavier Carpena

**"Clinical Psychology"**

Carolina Andrea Ziebold Jorquera  
Julia Garcia Durand  
Natalia Becker

**"Human Development"**

Maria Cristina Triguero Veloz Teixeira  
Rosane Lowenthal

**Technical support**

Camila Fragozo Ribeiro  
Giovanna Joly Manssur  
Maria Fernanda Liuti Bento da Silva

**EDITORIAL PRODUCTION****Publishing coordination**

Ana Claudia de Mauro

**Editorial interns**

Élcio Carvalho  
Isabela Franco Rodrigues

**Language editor**

Paula Di Sessa Vavlis

**Layout designer**

Acqua Estúdio Gráfico