RIMA
Revista Interdisciplinar e do Meio Ambiente
Interdisciplinary and Environment Journal

Organizational and Work Psychology and its contribution to a cooperative in the highlands of Paraíba: An intersection between management and sustainability

La Psicología del Trabajo Organizacional y su contribución a una cooperativa en el alto backlands de Paraíba: Una intersección entre gestión y sostenibilidad

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Abstract: This work, which is the result of the curricular unit: Management processe concerns the basic internship, which took place in a solid waste cooperative. This report presents the theoretical background, which is essential to guide the practice, the methodology, the results of the intervention carried out and the final considerations. Based on on-site visits, permeated by observation and interviews with the leader of the square and the cooperative members, an institutional diagnosis was made and, based on this, a demand survey was carried out. Interpersonal relationships with a view to the well-being of workers and the growth of the organization, and the underlying interference of emotions, stood out as the main demand for intervention at the time. This experience provided contact with the field of Organizational and Work Psychology, reflecting the possibilities for professional work in this area.
Keywords: *Organizational and Work Psychology; Cooperative; Recycling.*

Resumen: Este trabajo, resultado de la unidad curricular Procesos de Gestión, se refiere a la práctica básica, que tuvo lugar en una cooperativa de residuos sólidos. Presenta fundamentos teóricos, esenciales para orientar la práctica, metodología, resultados, basados en la intervención realizada y consideraciones finales. A partir de visitas locales, permeadas por la observación y entrevistas con el dirigente y los cooperativistas, se realizó un diagnóstico institucional y, con base en él, un relevamiento de la demanda. La relación interpersonal pensando en el bienestar de los asociados y el crecimiento de la organización, subyacente a esto la interferencia de las emociones, se destacó como la principal demanda de intervención en el momento. Esta experiencia proporcionó el contacto con el área de Psicología Organizacional y del Trabajo, reflejando las posibilidades de actuación profesional en este campo.
Palabras clave: *Psicología de la Organización y del Trabajo; Cooperativa; Reciclaje.*

INTRODUCTION

The practice of Organizational and Work Psychology predates its theorization and regulation as a profession, given the application of knowledge to issues involving human beings. As one of the three initial strands of psychology as a profession, it was initially strongly linked to the measurement of psychological constructs, gaining ground in the market precisely because of the interest in the application of psychometric tests (Bastos, Galvão-Martins, 1990).

Dating back to the 1960s, it originated as an emerging discipline by British researchers and was an area of theorizing, research and subsequent practice in organizational activities. Thus, organizational behavior was the object of study in this area in order to contribute to the world of work (Campos, 2011). In this sense, this area is configured at the intersection between man, work and society.

As such, Bernardo *et al* (2017) state that understanding the connections between psychology and the context of work, whether in the sphere of research or intervention, requires an understanding of the historical evolution of these relationships. In addition, it is crucial to analyze contemporary activities, both in terms of theoretical production and professional practice.

It is undeniable that Hugo Münstenberg and Elton Mayo played a crucial role in the formation of Organizational Psychology, making contributions to both the field of industrialization and human relations at work respectively, as we know it today. Nevertheless, over the course of more than a century, the discipline has undergone countless transformations and adaptations in its practices and conceptions. In contemporary times, we can see the incorporation of additional themes, such as quality of life at work, organizational climate, organizational culture, leadership, work teams, competency analysis and entrepreneurship (Bernardo *et al*, 2017).

This work was motivated by the development of activities related to Basic Internship IV, alluding to the curricular unit: Management Processes, which covers the theoretical part, indispensable for knowledge and grounding, in order to guide the subsequent process, the practical part in the organizational sphere. The internship was carried out by students on the Psychology course at the Santa Maria University Centre in an organization in the highlands of Paraíba, from the perspective of a third sector company. In this context, the Internship in Management Processes gave us contact with the field of work in Organizational and Work Psychology, allowing us to highlight theoretical aspects acquired, while making it possible to contribute to the corporation in question.

In this sense, we propose to answer the following guiding question: What contribution(s) can Organizational and Work Psychology offer to solid waste collectors' cooperatives, both in terms of managing their resources and their social protagonism, given that their work is of fundamental importance to the environment?

Based on this context, the general objective of this article is to understand the importance of Organizational and Work Psychology in the management of cooperative workers in their interpersonal and social relationships.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The meaning of work and its evolution over time

For a long time, the word work has been associated with a bad connotation, due to its origin, and this meaning has historically permeated civilizations. Etymologically, the word work comes from the Latin *tripalium*, a term used to designate an instrument of torture, or more precisely, "an instrument made of three sharpened sticks, sometimes still fitted with iron spikes, on which farmers would beat wheat, ears of corn, flax, in order to tear and fray them" (Albornoz, 1994, p.10).

Over time, the meaning of work changed and took on other connotations. In the 18th century, with the rise of the bourgeoisie and the development of productive sources, as well as the transformation of nature and the evolution of technology and science, the condemnation of idleness was emphasized, and work and productivity became sacralized (Kurz, 1997).

Regarding fulfillment in relation to work, it is possible to cite a maximum degree in the era of artisanal production, when the worker accompanied and interfered in all stages of the production process, identifying with their product and feeling directly responsible for the results obtained. With the advent of the Industrial Revolution, emotion was removed from the workplace, giving way to rationalization (Ribeiro, 2009).

The Taylorist/Fordist method used in industry quickly spread to other organizations, including the church, the family and leisure activities. New values began to determine the synchronization of life and work times, exact times for arriving and leaving the factory and predetermined times for performing a task were established. Work then came to be recognized as a central activity that took up almost the entire living space, absorbing most of the individual's time and creating a new social space to provide the necessary support. Industry transforms the concept of work and dictates new values to the society of the time, thus creating what can be called the Industrial Society (Ribeiro, 2009).

For Ribeiro and Léda (2004), with the crisis of the Taylorist/Fordist model, transformations occurred in labor relations. Today, despite the uncertainties caused by flexible capitalism, society continues to be linked to work, cultivating it as something essential. Increasingly, people devote many hours of their day to professional activities, using an important part of their free time qualifying for employability.

For modern man, free time has become scarce, giving rise to the expression "Time is money". The logic of work has permeated culture, sport and even intimacy. All human activities have become the focus of business or have become opportunities for someone to make money, a logic that has taken over all spheres of human life and existence. For the vast majority of people, work has become a job in modern society (Woleck 2002).

The role of psychologists in organizations

According to Schein (1982), Organizational and Work Psychology is an interdisciplinary field that seeks to understand the organizational phenomena that develop around a set of issues relating to the well-being of the individual, since, according to the author, organizations are complex social systems. As such, organizational psychology is a field that encompasses all the relationships between humans within institutions and is not isolated from the society in which it is inserted.

From a historical perspective, the practice of psychology in organizations developed from the beginning of the 19th century, under the name of industrial psychology, and was defined as the study of human behaviour in the aspects of life related to the production, distribution and use of the goods and services of our civilization. This area has been changing ever since, with no consensus among theorists on the various definitions that seek to better understand the field and its peculiares characteristics (Campos, 2011).

What has changed over time is that, according to the historical perspective, the meaning, value and subjective importance of work has changed for individuals and society. Until the 18th century, work conferred no *status* and was contrary to core social values. This condition only changed during the Industrial Age, when the employment contract appeared, in which the individual no longer owned the means of production or the end product, but sold his work for a fee to the owners of the means of production. Over time, questions and problems arose regarding man's relationship with work (Hashimoto, 2013).

According to Malvezzi (2010), psychologists were called upon to contribute to various assessments of people and interventions for the adjustment and development of individuals in the most diverse social groups. As discussed by Hashimoto (2013), among the first scholars of psychology applied to organizations, Koppes and Pickren highlight the work carried out by Kreppelin in Germany, on issues related to mental and physical fatigue in the face of certain tasks, and interpreted that the results indicated a curve of declining productivity in relation to time. For Fleury (2000), cultural diversity within an organization can have an impact on the effectiveness of the work itself, and this issue can be studied from different perspectives: At the organizational, group or individual level.

An important issue to discuss from a psychological perspective concerns the meaning that a particular job has for the individual, their peers and society. Dejours (1987) argues that the meaning of work is made up of two components: The meaningful content in relation to the subject, which involves the practical difficulty of the task, the significance of the finished task in relation to a profession and the social status, linked, implicitly, to the job, which allows the construction of the worker's personal and social identity. The significant content in relation to the object, which involves symbolic messages that the task can also convey to someone, or against someone, is also important to consider.

Still on this discussion, Dejours (1987) points out that this separation of contents is arbitrary, in that every activity contains both, since the investment in the individual is only renewed by virtue of the investment in the object, and vice-versa. The deep meaning of work, therefore, is inherent to each individual, and therefore created on the basis of the particular forms developed by each subject.

It's worth noting that some authors distinguish between the terms sense and meaning. However, in academic work and research, the concepts are often confused, as is the case in this study, which adopts both as synonyms. Thus, the meaning of work is understood as an affective structure that encompasses, in addition to the individual, collective and social meaning of work, the usefulness of the task performed for the organization to which one belongs, self-realization and satisfaction, the feeling of development, personal and professional evolution and the freedom and autonomy to carry out the tasks (Oliveira, 2004).

Beyond this meaning, Pagés *et al.* (2006) explain that the relationship between the individual, the organization and its historical context needs to be analyzed within what they call the socio-emotional space. Since work is the materialization of the individual's relationship with the modern organization, in order to understand it, it is essential to adopt an analytical model based on a combination of variables.

In order to highlight the importance of psychologists in the world of work, Bienal (2010) discusses the meaning of work in contemporary society, highlighting the emergence of capitalism, placing it as an essential condition for the survival of the individual, a consequence of the Industrial Revolution, generating changes in society, such as population growth, source of wealth and self-realization. With all the changes, capitalism became stronger and, with the emergence of industries, where the aim was to make a profit, man and his human abilities came into play, thus justifying the inclusion of psychology in the world of work. Its purpose is to study the relationships between human beings and what this implies for their lives, since work is an essential condition of human life.

Recycling, the environment and social inclusion

The government's actions to support the work of waste pickers seem to stem from the talks held during Eco-92, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. Held in Rio de Janeiro

in June 1992, the central purpose of the conference was to debate strategies that would reconcile socio-economic progress with the preservation and defense of the environment, among other objectives (Carmo, 2009).

Also according to Carmo (2009), environmental recycling agents have begun to gain prominence in debates due to the social perspective of generating income from waste, rather than the environmental dimension that this activity provides. Research into the role of environmental agents is closer to the socio-economic issue than the environmental one, in the sense of the scarcity of natural resources.

The workers who collect recyclable materials play a crucial role in the socio-environmental context of cities, even though they face precarious conditions and social stigmatization. The organization of these professionals has historically involved conflicts and disputes, because although they are recognized as environmental agents who give new purpose to urban waste, they are also the most vulnerable link in the recycling chain, due to unfavourable working conditions and limited profits, with intermediaries being the main beneficiaries in the recycling production structure (Sousa, Pereira, Calbino, 2021).

Recycling is the only source of work for many people, and is their source of subsistence and social inclusion in the face of a segregated market. Several authors discuss social inclusion predominantly from the perspective of unemployment as the main reference. From this perspective, being unemployed is seen as not being fully integrated into society. However, the question arises about those who work without having a formal job. Is unemployment the right starting point for analyzing the social inclusion/exclusion of a group of workers who carry out activities such as collecting recyclable materials? (Medeiros, Macedo, 2006).

In this sense, Magni and Günther (2014) emphasize the importance of the social inclusion of waste pickers as a fundamental foundation for promoting the health of these professionals. In addition to the obvious benefit related to a stable and regular increase in income, allowing for improved living conditions, such as access to food, adequate hygiene and medical care - elements pointed out by waste pickers involved in recent research - it is essential to consider that the inclusion promoted by joining an organized cooperative generates an additional benefit: improved environmental conditions in the workplace.

METHODOLOGY

According to Moreira (2012), before taking any kind of action in institutions, it is essential to carry out an organizational diagnosis. This is a scientific procedure in which each stage is interconnected in order to provide the researcher with guidance for future interventions, because only after a thorough

analysis of the entire context in which they intend to act can effective intervention strategies be implemented.

The organization targeted by the interventions was a waste pickers' cooperative located on the banks of the BR 230 highway in the municipality of Cajazeiras/PB. The cooperative is responsible for operating the recyclable materials processing unit, which is run through a public partnership between the municipal government and an NGO based in São Paulo. This entity runs the management/incubation process, as well as private companies that sponsor the service.

Throughout the process of institutional diagnosis, data was collected, gathering information about how the institution works. The following tools were used: interviews and informal dialogues, documentary research and observation. This survey was analyzed in order to identify possible demands on Organizational and Work Psychology, thus exploring their probable causes and consequences, seeking improvement; or even identifying strengths and outlining strategies to maintain them.

Once a demand had been identified from the institutional diagnosis, an intervention was proposed in order to contribute to the local corporation. This phase of the internship was planned as a group, under the guidance of the subject's teacher. In addition, we checked with the Cooperative's leadership to see what possibilities there were for carrying out the action, in order to adapt to the context.

The interventions in the field were made up of three stages: diagnosis, analysis, demand assessment and intervention. Initially, visits were made to the internship site in order to get to know the behavioral patterns of the manager(s), employee(s), model, structure and organizational culture. The purpose of this practice was to observe the functioning and performance of the sectors, as well as the relationships and communication between: manager-employee; employee-employee, in order to map out demands for intervention.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Institutional diagnosis

The cooperative began in 2021, when the Cajazeiras City Environment Department implemented the project with the Institute, in order to designate a correct policy for disposing of solid waste. Initially, the team was formed based on a selection notice, so that those who met the evaluation criteria for identifying the socio-economic profile passed, based on the information provided by the applicants on the application form. The identification process was carried out by representatives of the Institute, with the main factor established for the formation of the Waste Pickers' Cooperative in the aforementioned city being the socio-economic criterion.

Because the cooperative is in the incubation phase, the members' pro-labors, which are equivalent to a minimum wage, are paid by the NGO while they are in the process of organizing themselves to run the recycling business on their own. In this way, the Cooperative receives all the financial and training support from the third sector company in this initial phase, and later the Cooperative, already structured, must reimburse it. From this perspective, in the cooperative system there is no hierarchy of positions, but its culture is based on democracy in which everyone has the right to give an opinion and decide together, and the functions they perform are elective.

This is in line with Federal Law 5.764/71, which establishes the legislation of cooperativism, highlighting the clear tax incentive given by the state to these organizations, along with the exception to the classic cooperative rule, which allows the existence of an employment relationship between members. However, the general rule is that all cooperative members are considered associates, with the right to vote in meetings and decide jointly on the cooperative's management (Brasil, 1971 *apud* Magni, Günter, 2014).

Thus, the roles of president, treasurer, administrative director and conveyor coordinator are distributed among them, and these roles form part of the cooperative's board of directors. However, those who carry out these functions receive 20% more in their remuneration, according to the internal regulations, since they all carry out other processing functions like the others, so these functions are carried out through a vote among them. The processing functions are as follows: Recyclable material press operator (who drives the paper/cardboard pressing machine); Waste separator on the conveyor belt (who sorts the material); Forcing support (who organizes the waste to go up the conveyor belt) and the waste collectors (who are part of the team that goes out to collect the waste).

The institution operates in the morning and afternoon from Monday to Friday, so that Friday is reserved for training, according to the internal regulations. The administrator, who they call the square leader, leads these training sessions, which are technical and theoretical, but also social. In addition, there is often a visit from the head of the NGO's Human Resources (HR) department, who visits all the cooperatives in Brazil to provide training.

As far as clothing is concerned, the members of the cooperative follow a standardized approach: beige pants and a green blouse. In addition, according to the bylaws, members have one day a week when they can be absent to deal with matters of personal interest, and they are responsible for bringing a record to justify their absence, which is attached to their data. At the same time, everything that happens in the organization is documented and archived, as a way of building a history so that when someone in the future is interested in getting to know the cooperative, they can have access to everything that has been experienced and the techniques from the initial phase.

Demand survey

The activities carried out during the internship were as follows: a primary visit to get to know the leader, the work dynamics and the space, as well as the machinery; a round of conversations with the work team, in order to get to know them and understand the meaning of the work they do in the cooperative. Interviews were also carried out with three employees, two from the board of directors and one from the processing department, as well as with the manager in the person of the square leader, in addition to observation on each day of the visit and informal conversations in order to identify important points.

In the words of Robbins (2009), it is important to recognize the organizational structure. According to the author, it defines how tasks are distributed in the institution, and can be classified in three ways: a) Simple structure, which is not so elaborate and its authority is centred on a single person; b) Bureaucratic structure, with standardization and routine tasks as it's main characteristics. Its authority is centralized, but it follows a chain of command, and finally, c) Matrix structure, which values functional departmentalization, bringing together specialists and sharing their resources between the company's various products.

We found that the leader, who represents the NGO in the city of Cajazeiras, as a people manager and consultant encourages dialog, using the strategy of a daily round of talks before starting work. On this occasion, it is agreed who will carry out a particular task that day, since it gives everyone the opportunity to learn and carry out all the functions on different days. It's also a time for them to discuss any problems they may have had the previous day, as this happens quite often, according to those involved in the cooperative.

In addition, the leader of the square told us that the biggest difficulty in the cooperative is actually understanding what it means to be part of a cooperative (as opposed to the CLT system) and understanding, among many other issues, that the growth of others implies their growth, since in the dynamics of the cooperative everyone is an owner. It was also clear that the workers are fine with the idea of the bonus of everyone being an owner, but when it comes to management, there is resistance to accepting the burden, a possible justification for the problems mentioned.

In this respect, Robbins (2009, p.232) states that "good communication is essential for the effectiveness of any organization or group". Research shows that miscommunication is the main reason for interpersonal conflicts. It is therefore essential to establish a good level of communication between employees, so that the group's ideas can be transmitted and received clearly, ensuring that what has been said is understood.

Another point in evidence is the issue of empowerment, although some of them already have it, by understanding that recycling is of significant importance to society and that their work is more than environmental, it is educational and social. This understanding can give new meaning to the role they play in the organization. Another issue would be to demystify the idea that those who work with recycling are excluded from society.

One point worth highlighting is that, when asked in the interviews with the cooperative members about recognition for the work they do, the vast majority said that they didn't perceive this in the organization; however, this issue didn't affect motivation, as the team was enthusiastic about working. From this perspective, it was possible to reflect, interpret and infer that this motivation to work is more closely linked to personal motivation, since many face various problems at home and work ends up acting as an escape. In some cases, it's a place of welcome, since among them there was a certain compassion for the suffering of others.

From informal conversations, integration dynamics and interviews, it was recurrently said that there are considerable disagreements, although none were witnessed during the visits. In addition, one interviewee mentioned that there is gossip, insubordination and envy, as well as jealousy when it comes to friendships. Given that the vast majority have a low level of schooling, it was assumed that the disagreements pass through this sieve, presenting themselves as a factor of social vulnerability, including emotional vulnerability. During our visits, we noticed a certain amount of interference when it came to dealing with their emotions, and that there was a constant difficulty in separating what was personal or work-related.

In this sense, what was noticed was that many of the cooperative members face different problems linked to economic, territorial, health and educational vulnerability, which is directly reflected in the work environment. In this sense, the problem of interpersonal relationships was considered a relevant demand to be worked on, thinking about the well-being of the cooperative members and the growth of the organization, however, it was concluded that this underlies the interference of emotions, so this was highlighted as the main demand for the moment.

Proposed intervention

Given what was identified in the organizational diagnosis, it was possible to put together an intervention proposal that would address the elements present. Thus, based on the analysis of the data collected in the organization, we diagnosed the main demand to be the management of emotions, since we understood that this was generating a problem in communication, and therefore problems in interpersonal relationships.

That said, the intervention took place in two stages, so that, in the first stage, initially, in order to provide a moment of relaxation and meditation, we used the *mindfulness* technique, with the aim of favoring mindfulness in the present moment and self-awareness, providing the reflection of getting out of autopilot. According to Markus, *et al.* (2015) research results show that practicing *mindfulness* can contribute to job satisfaction and performance, emotional regulation, reduction of emotional exhaustion and *burnout*, job involvement and improvement in personal bonds.

We then talked about one of the multiple intelligences proposed by Gardner (Cooper and Sawaf, 1997), emotional intelligence. Afterwards, we discussed the four pillars proposed by Daniel Goleman (2018), which are essential for developing and managing emotional intelligence: self-awareness, self-management, empathy and social skills. For the occasion, reflection was instigated on the following questions: Which of these skills have you mastered the most? And which ones do you feel you need to work on?

According to Alves (2021), when emotions are handled well, it contributes to a successful life, enabling the individual to absorb new knowledge, improve interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships, increase productivity, raise self-esteem, self-motivation and thus be able to transfer positive feelings and sensations to the people with whom they relate.

Shortly afterwards, in order to reinforce the first two skills discussed in the conversation circle, emphasizing the intrapersonal relationship, we held a bingo made up of questions designed to encourage self-knowledge. Numbers were chosen from 1 to 28 (the total number of people involved), so that each number was linked to a question.

After reflecting, a gymkhana called Treasure Island was held to work on the other two skills. The aim of the dynamic was to work on the workers' interpersonal relationships, in order to contribute to a more pleasant coexistence, and to recognize the importance of teamwork. To this end, they were asked to commit to putting the techniques they had learned into practice over the next few days, informing them that in 15 days we would return for a meeting with the group to monitor the development of the skills they had learned.

Secondly, after 15 days had passed, we held a discussion round to close the internship. Using a trigger question, we talked about the process of intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships over the days following the intervention, asking if they had observed any changes in the working environment. With positive *feedback*, we concluded by expressing our gratitude for the involvement and availability of all the employees.

CONCLUSIONS

This work has shown that the correct management of municipal solid waste is crucial and has a direct impact on the ecosystem as a whole, as well as contributing positively to improving the population's quality of life.

It also emerged that the problem of unemployment mainly affects the lower social classes, pushing many families to dedicate themselves to scavenging and recycling in order to make a living. Thus, despite being fundamental in this production chain, environmental agents are the ones who benefit the least from this activity, since most of the profits are concentrated at the top of this structure, made up of large intermediaries and recycling companies.

In this sense, it was observed that the recycling cooperative model is a viable alternative both for municipalities, in terms of decentralizing urban cleaning services, and for the families involved in this social context. It is therefore essential to promote waste picker cooperatives and solid waste recycling, since local development is a possible way of combating regional disparities and the social problems faced. It was also noted that the role of psychology in the organizational and work sphere is fundamental in this process of social protagonism of the families of waste pickers, as well as in building a more equitable and collaborative society.

It can therefore be inferred that not only the students benefited from the application of the theories learned in the classroom, from technique to practice, but also the employees who were the target of the intervention. Managers are also highlighted, in terms of the importance of human resources management, which results in greater efficiency and effectiveness in their work, while emphasizing that their main goal should be to focus on the quality of life of workers.

Finally, it is believed that this basic internship tool goes beyond the academic sphere, having an immediate and perhaps prolonged effect, with the aim of committing the social actors involved in business dynamics, in this case cooperatives.

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