

VALUES, SIGNIFICANCE AND MOTIVATION AT WORK OF PRISON OFFICERS OF TWO DETENTION CENTERS IN BRAZIL

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ABSTRACT

The constructs values, significance of work and motivation represent key aspects to be considered in the career of any professional. In this study, the researchers' interest was focused on detention officers working in prisons in the state of Santa Catarina, Brazil. Chiefly, the study aimed to investigate the prison officers' values, motivation, significance of work based on their viewpoints. The study had 137 participants, of which 36 were female officers and 101 male officers. The methodological design of this research characterizes it as an applied, cross-sectional, descriptive, and quantitative survey. The instruments for data collection were the following: a sociodemographic questionnaire developed by the researchers for characterization of the sample; the Work Values Scale (WVS), validated in Brazil by Porto and Tamayo (2003), and the Inventory of Work Motivation and Meaning (IWMM), validated in Brazil by Borges and Alves Filho (2003). For data analysis, resources of descriptive statistics were used. Thus, this study took up the challenge of being a dialectical approach to the phenomenon in focus, based on the conception of work in a prison setting. The results show that to achieve professional stability, earn fair economic rewards and take up responsibilities are aspects of vital importance for the majority of the prison officers. The significance of work is directly associated with personal and family survival and the responsibility that they have both in the work and family contexts. Their motivation is associated with security and dignity. The main work-related aspect valued by prison officers is stability and the less important is prestige. At the end of the process of researching and producing knowledge, it is important to emphasize that important aspects about the prison officers' work relations emerged, an activity that is intertwined by social stigmas that can affect all their living environments.

Keywords: work values; meaning and significance of work; motivation; prison officers.

1. Introduction

Motivation is the drive for achievements in human activities. In the prison system, motivation of prison officers as well as of all professionals that work in prisons or penitentiaries is an important aspect that managers should consider, because their activities are not limited to ensure security of the convicted criminals, correctional facilities and the society. They are also part of the process of reeducation and social re-inclusion of criminals.

Thus, it can be inferred that the constructs motivation, meaning and values, when related to the professionals' work and present in any area of activity, can ensure well-being at work. The same can be assumed for prison officers.

Based on the assumption that society imposes moral, social, gender and ethical values, among others, it is advisable that the convicted offenders, maintained in penitentiaries, may establish a relationship with professionals who might be examples and/or inspirations to them. After all, their behaviors, gestures, words and attitudes reflect self-worth and professionalism, besides other attributes.

In this regard, it seems important to know aspects related to the prison officers' motivation at work. Besides the difficulties in accomplishing their work activities, there is also the social context in which they live, as well as the family, ethical and educational responsibilities that cannot be detached from their daily lives. It is natural that these aspects produce burdens of stress and, consequently, possible personal and professional demotivation.

Another aspect associated with the purpose of this study is related to the values that these professionals assign to work. In prisons, the daily life shared with other prisoners ends up building a new social reality. This is because all of them lose their freedom and are deprived of their old daily life. In prison, the criminals are subjected to times and rules as predetermined by the State, according to the regime imposed to serve their sentence. These aspects are key influences in determining their set of values.

Based on the above understandings and considering that the prison system is still perceived by society as a hostile environment which intimidates, hinders actions and ensures social order by segregating individuals that act against social and human rights, this study aimed to provide answers to the following question: how motivation, meaning and values are characterized in the work of prison officers? In order to answer this question, the present study was guided by the objective of characterizing the values, significance of work and motivation of prison officers in two correctional units in the Serra Catarinense, Brazil.

2. Literature Review

The values, significance of work and motivation are part of a great number of studies that resulted in the development of theories and approaches, which have been applied and improved over the years. This is presented in general lines in the next section.

2.1 Work values

The establishment of values in the workplace and in any organization does not arise all at once. They are gradually built, in connection with the family life, social relationships, work, in cultural manifestations and schools and places where teaching/learning are present. Little by little they are

restructured and modified as individuals, institutions and society consider, adopt and cultivate these values (Assêncio, 2008).

Work is a key element of the individuals' social identity and represents a privileged forum for the achievement of individual goals, since people spend most part of their lives at work. It is natural that at work people seek to attain personal goals that are important to them. Thus, it is necessary that individuals realize that the workplace contributes to achieve these goals. The study of work values aims to understand what is important to people in this environment, i.e., what are the reasons that lead people to work (Siqueira, 2002).

The beliefs that are present in the workplace constitute – and are incorporated by – the values that prevail there, as they result from the way workers perceive reality and make their choices in order to solve existing problems. The values are decisive in determining hierarchies, what are central or peripheral, what is important or secondary. They are also considered important motivators because they translate individual and collective interests and desires (Almeida et al., 2018).

Added to this is the fact that values play a vital role in organizations since they operate as integrative and guiding elements, given that they influence the individuals' behaviors and social interactions and guide the firm's daily routines. The organizational values set behaviors, strategies and goals, which in turn guide workers for specific purposes (Estivaleta, Andrade, Gomes & Costa, 2012).

2.2 Meaning and significance of work

The significance of work, according to Araújo et al. (2013), is made up of three variables: (i) meaning, which refers to the values and representations that an individual has in relation to his work; (ii) orientation, which is what the individual seeks in the workplace and guides his actions; and (iii) coherence, which can be defined as the harmony or balance that an individual expects from his relation with work.

In general, in order that life outside work has a meaning, it is necessary that life at work also have a meaning. Feelings of satisfaction, fulfillment and belonging, which give meaning to the individual's life, are associated with the time they spend at work (Antunes, 2006). Conversely, work often becomes a form of oppression of workers, exposing them to a degrading and inhuman condition. The meaning and significance given to work can explain this understanding (Oliveira, 2008).

Volpi and Volpi (2004, p.477) defend the point of view that work is constructive since it is through work that the world is built. Furthermore, it is through work that man accomplishes his project of life and makes investments in his well-being. The authors conclude, based on these assertions, that work "is a way of being in the world, it is not only an economic factor, but a fundamental factor of well-being" (author's translation).

From these perspectives, it is relevant to consider that understanding the real meaning of work is an important aspect for researchers. After all, the characteristics of work in the contemporary world require knowing its multiple dimensions and characteristics so that it has some sense of purpose for those who work (Morin, 2002).

Given that work occupies a central space in people's lives, it is vital that it contributes to their personal and professional development and increases the sense of responsibility of those who execute it. In

order that it occurs, “various resources can be considered: the presence of challenges, autonomy in managing the activities and feedback mechanisms on performance” (Morin, 2001, p.18).

2.3 Professional motivation

Motivation is represented by the causes that produce certain behaviors; it is the power and determination that drive this behavior. Such power confers to the behavior characteristics of direction, intensity and permanence (Maximiano, 2011).

It is the managers’ obligation, as Siqueira (2014) point out, to identify what are their subordinates’ desires and aspirations. Only then the managers will be able to stimulate motivation of each employee towards efficiency and productivity.

According to Oliveira (2015, p.1046), “motivation is everything that causes a person to act. It is an external stimulus or is produced internally by the core self of a person”. Its purpose is to identify possible influences that individuals or groups in the organization have on workers’ behaviors so as to increase their performance and results. Siqueira (2014, p. 11) emphasizes that motivation represents the “intensity, direction and persistence of an individual’s efforts to achieve a certain goal” (author’s translation).

In the workplace, it is possible that demotivation and dissatisfaction produce organizational losses in quality and productivity. From the workers’ point of view, the negative effects are directly connected with “reduction of the quality of life at work, of physical and mental health, stress, low productivity, poor performance at work and lack of commitment with the organization” (Oliveira & Silva, 2015, p.179).

2.4 The work of prison officers

Prison officers carry out an important, but high-risk public service, because they protect the civil society through the execution and application of prisoners’ penalty, their surveillance and custody during the period that they serve their sentence (DEPEN, 2006). According to the manual of prison warden and officers, the main responsibility of this professional is to “ensure the security of the prison unit where they work, maintaining discipline. To watch over, supervise, inspect, search and escort inmates or prisoners, so as to ensure order and the security of the prisoners as well as of the prison” (DEPEN, 2006, p.04).

The job of a prison officer “requires a set of protection measures to guarantee their social, economic and psychological integrity, also through continuing education and special working conditions” (Correia, 2006, p.11). It is considered, for many reasons, a profession that poses risks and stress. It is a work that is likely to have negative consequences for the job occupants, such as “disorders in various personal sectors, both physical and psychological. The risk and vulnerability are characteristics always present in jails” (Lourenço, 2010).

In this context, understanding what is the influence that the work organization has on the workers’ quality of life, mental health, fatigue, burnout, and development of illnesses is all-important, either to understand or intervene in work situations that can be conducive to many forms of suffering and disease (Lancman & Jardim, 2004).

3. Methodological procedures

The research was conducted in 2017. It is an applied, cross-sectional, quantitative, exploratory, and descriptive study; it had the design of a survey. It analyzes phenomena from an interdisciplinary perspective based on the knowledge of Legal, Human and Health Sciences. With regard to the epistemological positioning, the study can be located in the functionalist quadrant of Burell and Morgan (1979). It was carried out in two prisons located in the region of the Serra de Santa Catarina with 137 prison officers. The instruments used for data collection were: a socio-demographic questionnaire developed by the researchers for the sample characterization; the Work Values Scale (WVS) validated in Brazil by Porto and Tamayo (2003) and the Inventory of Work Motivation and Meaning (IWMM) validated in Brazil by Borges, Alves Filho (2003). Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences – SPSS 2.0, and resources of descriptive statistics were used. The study was submitted to and approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Universidade do Planalto Catarinense.

4. Results

A total of 137 prison officers participated in the study. Table 01 shows the main socio-professional characteristics of the participants.

Table 01. Percent distribution of participants according to a set of socio-professional data

	VARIABLES	PERCENT
Gender	Female	27.7%
	Male	72.3%
Age	20 to 29 years	24.8%
	20 to 39 years	33.6%
	40 to 49 years	24.1%
	50 years or over	17.5%
Marital status	Single	29.9%
	Married	48.9%
	Stable union	18.2%
	Separated/divorced	2.9%
Children	Yes	54%
	No	46%
Education	Higher education (complete)	21.9%
	Post-graduation (incomplete)	5.1%
	Post-graduation (complete)	73%
Time served in position	3 to 6 years	5.1%
	7 to 10 years	40.9%
	11 and 20 years	29.9%
	20 and 29 years	15.3%
	29 years +	8.8%

The higher percent of male participants is justified by the fact that it is a prison that is exclusive for male inmates and not female ones, and the prison warden and officers are responsible for the activities directly connected with inmates. The percentages found are corroborated in various studies (Bonez, Dal Moro & Santiago, 2009, Sehnem, 2013, Garcia Reis, Souza, Cardoso, & Brit, (2012), Souza, 2015) conducted in Brazilian prisons and penitentiaries, which mention that the majority of their employees are men.

Regarding education, the percentages are similar to other studies (Bonez, Dal Moro & Sehnem, 2013, Correia, 2006), which found that most of the prison employees have an educational level above that required for the position.

4.1 Work-related values of prison officers

The Work Values Scale is comprised of four factors: “Fulfillment at Work”, “Social Relations”, “Stability” and “Prestige” (Borges & Mourão, 2013). The expressed results were construed as follows: Mean value < 3 = negative attitude; Mean value of 3 to 4 = conflicting attitude; Mean value > 4 = positive attitude.

The analyses of the first category, “Work-Related Values of Prison Officers” show the results found for the four factors investigated:

- **Fulfillment at Work:** this construct involves the search for pleasure, satisfaction, the importance of stimulation and freedom of thought and action at work. Based on a 5-point Likert type scale, the general mean (\bar{X}) in this category was 3.33 (SD 0.80). The questions related to ‘Take pleasure in what I do’ (\bar{X} 4.34; SD 0.77), ‘Personal Satisfaction’ (\bar{X} 4.15; SD 0.60) and ‘Professional fulfillment’ (\bar{X} 4.08; SD 0.95) attained the highest mean values ($\bar{X}>4$), which shows that the respondents perceive sources of fulfillment/sense of achievement in their jobs. These results corroborate the findings of Cahú (2013) and Santos (2014), who found similar data in their studies. The lowest means were found in, respectively: ‘Work that improves my professional knowledge’ (\bar{X} 2.40; SD 0.49); ‘Intellectually-stimulant work’ (\bar{X} 2.21; SD 0.40) and ‘Work that requires originality and creativity’ (\bar{X} 1.86; SD 0.72). These results are similar to the findings of Siqueira, Martins da Silva and Angnes (2017), who, in this regard, argue that prison officers have their professional identity formed by legal, bureaucratic and institutional norms, with unique labor characteristics, different from other careers, with routines that do not allow creativity and innovation.

- **Social Relations:** humans cannot live alone; during their lives, various abilities are developed to establish relationships with the surrounding world. Social relationships are vital for living in society; they motivate and guide man during his evolution process (Porto & Tamayo, 2003). Data assessment reveals an overall mean of 3.16 and SD 0.90 for ‘Social Relations’, which is considered a satisfactory mean value. The items ‘Being Useful for Society’ (\bar{X} 4; SD 0.63), ‘Knowing People’ (\bar{X} 3.78; SD 1.05), and ‘Helping Work Peers’ (\bar{X} 3.96; SD 0.49) attained the highest means when added to the values relating to ‘very important’ and ‘extremely important’ alternatives – which are determinant aspects to social relations in the work context of prison officers. In the studies of Esteves (2008) and Cahú (2013), the Social Relations factor attained

the highest mean value, only behind Fulfillment at Work. Paiva (2013) and Pozzobom, Madruga, Ávila, & Beuron (2014) also presented similar results in their studies.

- **Prestige:** Prestige refers to authority, career success and power of influence at work. This factor has a relation with self-promotion, since it provides the achievement of goals related to personal success and influence on others (Porto & Tamayo, 2003). For this factor, the overall Mean found was 2.28 (SD 0.74). ‘Competitiveness’ (\bar{X} 1.13; SD 0.33) was the question most rejected by the participants, followed by ‘Following the Family Profession’ (\bar{X} 1.55; SD 0.49), ‘Being Famous’ (\bar{X} 1.66; SD 0.47), and ‘Attaining a Prominent Position’ (\bar{X} 2.0; SD 0.49). The most positive mean was found in ‘Facing Challenges’ (\bar{X} 3.54; SD 0.71). Thus, it can be concluded that personal promotion and influence on others are not significant factors in the participants’ job. Hierarchically, the mean value was below the other ones, which also corroborates other studies that used this instrument, such as Cahú, (2013), Cammarosano, (2014), Esteves, (2008), Paiva, Torres and Luz, (2014), Paiva and Dutra (2017), and Pozzobom, Madruga, Ávila, & Beuron, (2014).

- **Stability:** the stability factor refers to the search for security and order in life so that all personal material needs can be provided (Porto & Tamayo, 2003). This category has an overall mean of 4.37 (SD 0.73). ‘Job Stability’ (\bar{X} 5.0; SD 0) was marked by all respondents, followed by ‘Being Financially Independent’ (\bar{X} 4.83; SD 0.37) and ‘Financial Stability’ (\bar{X} 4.7; SD 0.45). The search for job security, with the possibility that it will ensure satisfaction of all economic needs, leads people to seek for a stable job with consequent financial independence. This category had the highest frequency and highest mean of responses of prison officers, corroborating other studies, such as the ones conducted by Esteves (2008), Goés (2006) and Paiva et.al. (2014).

4.2 Work motivation and meaning

The second aspect to be assessed was Work Motivation and Meaning. The IWMM is composed of four scales, of which two are related to the facets of the significance of work – value attributes (how the work should be) and descriptive attributes (how the work really is), added by two facets related to motivation components: expectations, i.e., what one expects from work; and instrumentality, how much effort or dedication at work would ensure the achievement of desired outcomes (Borges & Alves Filho, 2003).

- **Value attributes:** they correspond to the perception of how the work should be. The factors defined in the factorial framework of these attributes are: ‘Personal and Family Survival’ (\bar{X} . 3.35; SD 0.23), ‘Self-Expression and Personal Achievement’ (\bar{X} . 2.93; SD 0.30), ‘Fairness/Justice at Work’ (\bar{X} . 2.54; SD 0.46), ‘Fatigue/Burnout and Dehumanization’ (\bar{X} . 2.09; SD 0.62). ‘Personal and Family Survival’ had the highest score, followed by ‘Self-Expression and Personal Achievement’. Such findings are similar to other studies, e.g., Caldas and Filho (2007), Gomes (2014) and Silva, Kemp and Carvalho-Freitas (2015).

-Descriptive attributes: they correspond to the consideration of how the work really is: ‘Self-Expression’ (\bar{X} 1.92; SD 0.79), ‘Fatigue/Burnout and Dehumanization’ (\bar{X} 2.00; SD 1.28), ‘Independence and Economic Reward’ (\bar{X} 2.58; SD 1.06), ‘Work Conditions’ (\bar{X} 2.64; SD 0.92), and ‘Responsibility’ (\bar{X} 3.09; SD 0.71). The highest means found were for ‘Responsibility’, ‘Economic Independence’ and ‘Work Conditions’. These findings agree with what has been already known about the work on public security, with respect to the high level of responsibility and different work conditions from other work categories. These issues are addressed by Silveira (2008), Santos (2014), Jaskowiak and Fontana (2015), DEPEN (2016) and Fagundes, Costa, & Moreira, (2017).

- Expectation: The theory of expectation suggests that the intensity of an individual’s endeavor for action is directly related to the expected outcome of such action (SIQUEIRA, 2014). The factors defined in the factorial framework are: ‘Security and Dignity’ (\bar{X} 3.92; SD 0.04); ‘Self-Expression’ (\bar{X} 3.77; SD 0.21); Independence and Economic Reward (\bar{X} 3.7; SD 0.11); ‘Fatigue/Burnout and Dehumanization’ (\bar{X} 2.29; SD 1.72); ‘Responsibility’ (\bar{X} 2.29; SD 0.58). The meaning of work for prison officers is very important when security and dignity, aspects that are supported by the remuneration earned and the stability that the public service can provide, are perceived. Family is considered the core sphere by the interviewees, and security, theirs and their family members, is their main concern. In general, it can be seen that the officers give diverse meanings to work, but dignity is the first, leaving behind all others. Similar results were reported by Santos (2014), Magalhães (2017), Alves Filho and Borges (2014), Caldas and Alves Filho (2007) and Siqueira, Silva and Angnes (2017).

- Instrumentality: it is the perceived relation between the execution of tasks and the achievement of results. It represents how much the achievement of a result is perceived by the subject in a condition of job dependence. It is the subject’s contribution to the attainment of the expected goals (Alves Filho & Borges, 2014). The factors defined in the factorial framework of instrumentality reflect the highest values in Fatigue and Dehumanization (\bar{X} 3.27; SD 0.61), followed by Responsibility (\bar{X} 3.24; SD 0.65). The lowest values were for Remuneration and Economic Independence (\bar{X} 2.99; SD 0.88) and Work Material Conditions (\bar{X} 2.57; DP 0.76). The reality of the prisons under study is opposed to the one described in other prison structures in many Brazilian states. The latter is marked by overcrowding, constant threats, unhealthy conditions and high levels of stress among workers. The local reality in the prisons studied describes a physical structure that follows the required standards for correctional units so as to ensure the prisoners’ dignity. In addition, personal materials and equipment provided to the prison officers is adequate both in quality and quantity. Siqueira, Martins da Silva and Angnes (2017) mention these and other characteristics of a work that is meaningful for prison officers, namely, a place that offers good work conditions, especially one that is safe, with opportunities for professional growth and development of a useful work for the society.

In general, the analysis of work aspects that motivate prison officers, verified by the IWMM, enables to conclude that for the respondents the significance of work is directly associated to ‘Personal and Family Survival’ (how work should be) and ‘Responsibility’ (how work really is). The motivation-related

components highlighted ‘Security and Dignity’ as the ones that define what the participants expect from work, and ‘Responsibility’, as the one which justifies the effort or dedication to work.

5. Conclusions

For the majority of prison officers, job stability, fair economic rewards and responsibility are very important aspects. For them, the significance of work is directly associated with personal and family survival and the responsibility that they have both in the work and family contexts. Their motivation is associated with financial security and dignity. The main value of work for the prison officers is stability, and the lowest value is prestige.

The results of this survey are similar to the ones found in the literature that supported this study. This shows that work motivation and significance are essential factors for the attainment of a high degree of satisfaction. Consequently, remuneration that secure financial independence and recognition by their colleagues and superiors are also key factors for prison officers.

At the end of the research process, key aspects emerged about the prison officers’ work relations, an activity that is permeated by social stigmas that can affect their lives and work and family environments. Based on this understanding, it can be emphasized that work is not limited to an activity, to simply doing something, but also as a form of social relation that may imply relations of inequality, power and even domination. Work is not only expressed by the task accomplished. Its meaning requires more observation by managers and academics.

Social and organizational changes, particularly those relating to public bodies, pass through effective public policies that must be (re)formulated aiming at improving the quality of services and people’ lives. Furthermore, establishing the right to a well-balanced work environment, consistent with a decent life and socio-environmental health, is what here is advocated.

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