



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Analysis of the subjective experience of suffering in the psychodynamic work clinic

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate and deeply understand the subjective experience of suffering within the psychodynamic context of work, focusing particularly on the psychological and emotional aspects involved. Through qualitative analysis, this research delves into how individuals interpret and experience suffering in the workplace, considering the psychodynamic variables that influence their perceptions and reactions. This provides valuable insights into the internal dynamics of work-related suffering, as well as how these factors impact the psychological well-being of employees. Furthermore, the study explores how these findings can be applied in work intervention practices. By understanding the nuances of the subjective experience of suffering, practitioners can develop more effective and empathetic strategies to support employees facing psychological challenges in the workplace. This opens possibilities for interventions that are more tailored and responsive to the unique needs of individuals..

Keywords: Psychodynamic analysis, workplace suffering, workplace subjectivity'e

INTRODUCTION

The analysis of the subjective experience of suffering and pleasure in organizational contexts has been the object of study privileged by the perspective of psychodynamic work clinic. This approach recovers for the psychology of work and organizations the study of the relationship between subjectivity and work, emphasizing the impact of these experiences in the formation of the psychological reality of the working subject.

Particularly the subjective experience of suffering at work has been studied mainly by the French psychoanalyst Dejours (1998, 2006, 2010, 2012, 2012a). This proposal for analysis and intervention in the field of work organization and its effects on labor subjectivity (Porras- Velásquez, 2016, 2017b; Porras-Velásquez & Parra D'aleman, 2018b; Porras-Velásquez & Parra D'aleman, 2019a). It arises from a psychoanalytic reading of work psychopathologies carried out by Christopher Dejours since the eighties.

The traditional psychology of work and organizations following a functionalist ideology (Porras Velásquez, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2012a, 2013, 2014), has neglected the

investigation of the subjective aspects involved in work (Porras Velásquez, 2018, 2020), and the subjective discomfort derived from said work (Porras Velásquez, 2015, 2017a; Porras-Velásquez & Parra D'aleman, 2018).

In this sense, it is important to remember that work implies a form of personality commitment to face a task framed by both material and social restrictions. In addition, the work involves bridging the gap between what is prescribed and what is real; Walking the path between what is prescribed and what is effective must be invented or discovered each time by the subject that works (Dejours, 2012a; Wlosko and Ros, 2019; García Rivera and Porras Velásquez, 2019).

Although our explanation of work psychodynamics clinics and Dejours' approach is detailed, we recognize the importance of engaging in critical discussion of existing literature. There are shortcomings in the current literature that need to be addressed, particularly in understanding psychodynamic dynamics in the workplace in a broader and more diverse context. Several previous studies tend to be limited to specific contexts and do not adequately explain how psychodynamic theories can be applied to various types of work environments and organizational cultures. Additionally, there is a need to critique how Dejours' approach interacts and may conflict with contemporary work psychology theories and practices.

By integrating this critical review, our research aims to provide a more comprehensive and diverse perspective on the subjective suffering in the context of work psychodynamics. We strive to show how Dejours' approach can be expanded or modified to respond to current needs and explore areas not yet covered by previous literature. Thus, this research not only fills

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existing knowledge gaps but also provides new insights that can inform practice in this field and encourage further research.

This study presents a significant and unique contribution to the field of work psychodynamics by offering a new and in-depth perspective on the subjective experience of suffering at work. Through extensive and critical literature analysis, this study not only examines the theoretical foundations of subjective suffering in the context of work psychodynamics but also reveals new dimensions not fully explored in previous research. This includes examining the unique ways individuals interpret and respond to psychological stress in the workplace, as well as the complex interaction between personal and contextual factors that shape this experience.

The main contribution of this research lies in the merging of insights from various disciplines, including psychology, sociology, and organizational studies, to build a more holistic and multifaceted understanding of workplace suffering. This allows us to see how psychodynamic factors are integrated within broader social and organizational contexts, providing new insights into how the work environment and organizational structure can affect employees' psychological well-being.

Furthermore, this research aims to offer practical recommendations for practitioners and policymakers in designing and implementing more effective intervention strategies in the workplace. Thus, this study not only contributes to the academic field but also has significant practical implications for improving the quality of life and well-being in the work environment.

METHODS

In this research, we adopted a literature analysis methodology to deeply understand the phenomenon of subjective suffering in the context of work psychodynamics. This method was chosen for its ability to comprehensively gather, review, and synthesize various relevant literature sources. We systematically searched for scientific articles, peer-reviewed journals, and other publications related to the topic of work psychodynamics, Dejours' approach, and the subjective experience of suffering at work.

The literature selection process was conducted with strict criteria to ensure the relevance and credibility of sources. We focused on articles that provided theoretical and empirical insights related to psychodynamic dynamics at work, as well as studies exploring the subjective aspect of work experience. Subsequently, we conducted a critical analysis of the collected literature, identifying key themes, patterns, and contradictions in previous research.

This approach allowed us to build a strong understanding of the theoretical and empirical background of the research problem and identify existing knowledge gaps. The results of this literature analysis will form the basis for the development of arguments and conclusions in our research, thus making a significant contribution to understanding subjective suffering in the context of work psychodynamics.

What are work clinics?

According to Orejuela (2018), work clinics are mainly a perspective of analysis of the work-subjectivity relationship, in which the singular dimension of the working subject is recognized; work as a central function in the psychic economy (psychodynamics); and to the

organization as a specific context of intersubjective relationships and a symbolic framework for them. In other words, as an analytical perspective of the work-subject-subjectivity relationship, work clinics are both a theoretical and a clinical commitment that fundamentally seek to understand and overcome the malaise of the contemporary world of work.

For Zabala, Guerrero and Besoain (2017), work clinics are those ways of investigating and intervening in collective and individual subjectivity at work. In addition, they point out that, although there are different ways of conceiving subjectivity, these clinical approaches coincide in placing the focus of attention on the lived experience and the subjective involvement of the subjects at work, as well as on the analysis of change processes. at work. For this reason, it is important for those who want to venture into this field of human knowledge and carry out work clinical work in organizations, as a professional practice, to ask themselves initially, at least: How is this experience described? Does it analyze? What aspects are considered to investigate and intervene in the subjective experience of workers at work? What perspectives exist? In a few words, work clinics address the experience of working from the limit that work represents for the subjects, testing the subjectivity of workers, in the sense that it confronts them with the "real" possibility of job failure.

Work clinics openly dialogue with concepts such as professional identity or personal fulfillment at work. In this analytical perspective, the subject is assumed in relation to others, since working implies being with others, really, symbolically or imaginarily present in the existential and intersubjective game, typical of work contexts.

Work clinics refer to a field of research and intervention within the psychology of work and organizations. In this field of study, we find three (3) perspectives to study the relationship between subjectivity, work and the context of experience. The first of the clinical perspectives is the so-called work psychodynamics, proposed mainly by Dejours (1998, 2011; Dejours. and Gernet (2014). This proposal arises from a psychoanalytic reading of work psychopathologies, elaborated by Dejours. This approach clinical has as its purpose the study of suffering at work. The second perspective is the clinic of the activity proposed mainly by Yves Clot. For Clot (2009), work activity is something directed by the behavior of the individual, but for the satisfaction of others. For this reason, the work is a meeting point with others and that allows the subject to leave himself and recognize himself as the author of a collective work. The third perspective is known by the name of Clinical Sociology, whose main representatives are Guallejac and Bendassolli. According to Bendassolli (2009), the social "has emotional, affective and unconscious dimensions and that the individual is shaped by the culture, by social institutions and organizations" (p.71). In this case, it would be applied to work situations, in which every subject would participate.

Now, taking into account the particular interest of this document and with the purpose of understanding a part of the work of the occupational clinician, we will delve a little deeper into the psychodynamic perspective of the occupational clinic (Salamanca Quiñones & Porrás Velásquez, 2022; 2023).

Analysis of the concept of work clinics, as described by Orejuela (2018) and expanded by Zabala, Guerrero, and Besoain (2017), as well as Salamanca Quiñones & Porrás Velásquez (2022; 2023), offers deep insights into the relationship between work subjects, subjectivity, and the work context. Work clinics are not just an analytical

approach but also a theoretical and clinical commitment to understanding and overcoming the malaise in the contemporary world of work. This concept opens a dialogue with concepts such as professional identity and personal fulfillment at work, highlighting the importance of the intersubjective and symbolic contexts at work.

The three main perspectives in work clinics identified in the literature are work psychodynamics, activity clinic, and clinical sociology. Each provides a different framework for understanding and addressing issues related to work and subjectivity: the first being Work Psychodynamics (Dejours, 1998; Dejours, 2011; Dejours & Gernet, 2014), rooted in psychoanalysis, focuses on suffering at work. It explores how work structure and demands affect the mental health of employees, emphasizing the psychological and emotional aspects of work experience. The second approach, the Activity Clinic (Clot, 2009), emphasizes social interaction in the work context. Clot describes work as an activity that facilitates encounters with others and helps individuals recognize themselves as part of a collective effort. The third approach, Clinical Sociology (Gualejac and Bendassolli, 2009), integrates emotional, affective, and unconscious aspects of social experience into work analysis. According to Bendassolli, each individual is shaped by culture, social institutions, and organizations, which impacts the way they experience and participate in work situations.

The approach of work clinics, especially the psychodynamic perspective, allows us to better understand how the work environment and job demands affect the psychological and physical well-being of employees. It also highlights the importance of considering the interaction between individuals and their social context in work analysis. Work clinics bring attention to the importance of a multidisciplinary approach in understanding work as a subjective and collective experience, as well as the importance of interventions designed to support mental health and well-being of workers.

Furthermore, by exploring the psychodynamic perspective of occupational work clinics in more depth, we can develop a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by workers and effective ways to support them in the workplace. This approach enables professionals in the field to identify and address the root problems impacting workers' subjectivity, providing more sustainable and meaningful solutions.

The psychodynamic perspective of the work clinic

For Dejours (1998, 2001, 2006, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2020), this perspective consists fundamentally in the dynamic analysis of the psychic processes mobilized by the confrontation of the subject with the reality of work. In such a way that the subject of treatment in this clinic is the subject of a unique story, bearer of hopes and desires. The question that arises at this moment is: What is work? Work, as we have been saying for some time (Porrás-Velásquez, 2017; Porrás-Velásquez & Parra D'aleman, 2018a; Salamanca Quiñones & Porrás Velásquez, 2019), work is not employment. Nor could it be reduced to theoretical work, that is to say: "what should be done". Work is activity. that is, "what is done". Work is a central dimension of existence, constitutive of the psyche and a means by which the subject is socially linked, that is, the worker is an agent of his own history and his own decisions (Porrás-Velásquez, 2020; Porrás-Velásquez & Parra D'aleman, 2019).

Today we know, thanks to ergonomics studies, that there is a gap between the theoretical or prescribed work

and the actual work. In other words, work is what is not given by the theoretical organization of work, in the manuals of procedures and functions described, prescribed and assigned to a person or group of people in a position or job position in a particular company. Work is everything that men and women manage to invent, at a critical moment or an existential crisis, to find the best way to solve the problem of the demands that are demanded of them in the workplace, among which they should do, what they can do and what they would like to do, taking into account what they (as workers) think or believe is fair or good.

According to Dejours (2020), working means daily facing dangers such as fear, boredom, and also humiliation, shame, the feeling of injustice, the feeling of betraying one's convictions, their own ideals, their own wishes etc.

Dejours (1998) argues that work is a central element in shaping our identity. As we know, from psychoanalysis, identity is that part of the subject that never definitively stabilizes and that needs repeated confirmation every day. However, if this confirmation is not given by the social or collective other, an "identity" crisis can be generated, a period or moment during which the subject no longer manages to recognize himself, which causes great suffering. For this reason, it is affirmed that work is an agent that produces our identity; because identity is a conquest that is managed to capitalize in the order of the singular, but it operates or functions in the order of intersubjectivity.

By mentioning the main concepts of work psychodynamics, proposed by Christopher Dejours, review four. These concepts are: suffering, pleasure, defensive strategies and the real. Dejours (2009), proposes the notion of suffering to mark the limits of a field of research that differs from the study of mental illness, since in classical psychiatry only two mental states are distinguished: that of mental illness, on the one hand and, that of mental health, on the other hand. This author considers that there is a very wide space between health and illness, which should be considered especially when talking about the subject-work-suffering relationship. Dejours considers that health is an end in itself and that what should be taken more into account, due to its importance, are the means that the subject uses to reach that state of health or to recover it when it has been lost.

According to Orejuela (2018), the clinical perspective of the psychodynamics of work:

approaches some theoretical and methodological elements of clinical psychology and psychoanalysis, and thus redefines the meaning and value of work; also, of its relations with human subjectivity and certain aspects that compose it such as identity, mental suffering, happiness and health (p.67).

For this author, the psychodynamic perspective of the work clinic is "a subdisciplinary field of analysis, which places work as a central aspect in the subject's life, which fulfills functions of directing the meaning of their existence, self-expression and emancipation" (p.67). In short, according to Orejuela's (2018) proposal, work clinics can be understood as a critical commitment of a theoretical-clinical-therapeutic-investigative nature that aims to help understand, make visible, and overcome the discomfort and suffering typical of work. world of work (Wlosko, 2015).

For their part, Fleury & Macedo. (2012), suggest that there is a convergence between the definition of the field of psychodynamics of work and its fundamental elements, which are: suffering, the centrality of work for the subject and the constitution of collective defensive strategies to

withstand the pressures of organization of work, seeking normality and avoiding pathology. For this reason, it can be affirmed that the psychodynamics of work seeks to intervene in the community and not in individuals in isolation.

For a more accurate understanding of this clinical perspective of work, it is necessary, according to Fleury and Macedo. (2012), keep in mind some of its four essential premises. In the first place, the centrality of work for the subject in the constitution of his subjectivity. Secondly, the absence of neutrality of the work regarding mental health and the constitution of the subject. Third, the possibility of changing work situations, considering that they exist due to human decisions and not unfortunately. Fourthly, the management of said changes occurs from the work modification and not from an adaptation of the workers to the existing work.

In a few words, it can be stated that "the psychodynamic clinic of work is concerned with listening to the unconscious and allowing suffering to be symbolized. This under a transference framework that mobilizes a demand and opens up desire" (García Ospina and Álvarez Ramírez, 2014, p.484). For these authors, the psychodynamic work clinic is a valuable proposal for organizational contexts if one takes into account that it is a space where the subjects of the work do not usually have the opportunity to express their discomfort or suffering. For this reason, this type of initiative should be promoted and fostered in companies so that subjects have the option of being heard and mobilize there the particular relationship they have with work and give new meaning to their position, reducing discomfort or suffering. (Elaborate through a process of subjective rectification).

Now, Orejuela (2018), states that "suffering, as a modality of discomfort that aspires to recognition, is the subjective experience of excessive tension and wear and tear that leads to the loss of self-experience" (p.126). According to this author:

Suffering is the affective experience of tension, struggle and exhaustion, intimately experienced as a drama, a pain, against the risk of psychopathological decompensation. In other words, it is a state of psychic tension experienced as exhaustion (mental and bodily) derived from the effort to restore psychic economy, that is, derived from the effort to seek to unblock the discharge of an unconscious psychic overload". (Orejuela, 2018, p.126).

In this order of ideas, "suffering arises from the" clash between an individual history, carrier of projects, hopes and desires, and a work organization that ignores them "(Dejours, 1998, p. 133). This tells us what causes it. That is, what is the cause of suffering or discomfort at work. but it does not tell us how it operates, how it works, what is the function it performs, in the psychic economy. However, "suffering is not a psychopathology. This category would only fit for "decompensated mental illness" (Dejours, p. 59), mental illness, psychopathology could be a destination in which suffering could derive, but not necessarily, if defense strategies have been effective.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the subjective experience of suffering and pleasure in organizational contexts has been the object of study privileged by the perspective of psychodynamic work clinic. This approach recovers for the psychology of work and organizations the study of the relationship between subjectivity and work, emphasizing the impact of these experiences in the formation of the psychological

reality of the working subject (Porrás Velásquez, 2022; 2022a).

Psychology as a scientific discipline and professional practice of late modernity, assumes work as an object of study, based on the relations of capitalist production. In this sociocultural, economic and historical context, teacher discomfort arises as a symptom of the lack of recognition of the quality and beauty of their work as a social contribution (Porrás Velásquez, 2023; 2023a; 2023b). This lack of social recognition negatively affects, mainly, his professional identity and his ability to relate to himself in a healthy way. Well, we must not forget that working is above all a relationship with oneself.

Work is not only an area that generates subjective discomfort or psychological suffering, it is also a place where the subject and the group of workers deploy their intelligence and their abilities to face "the Real" of human work, in their daily work. both in the classroom and outside of it. For the clinical approaches mentioned here, work has a double face: on the one hand, it belongs to social reality and, on the other hand, work is a stage where conflicts and singular desires involving history are projected. of each subject. Likewise, in this singular and collective plot, the subject has access to creativity and the transformation of his own existential space.

Finally, for the psychodynamic clinic, work is both a material and symbolic activity that constitutes the social bond as well as an experience that constitutes and constitutes the subjective life of the workers, which accounts for the singular ways of suffering or experiencing the teacher's discomfort or the psychological suffering and experience pleasure and job satisfaction.

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