

Meaning of work and disability: a study with wheelchair users after spinal cord injury

Sentido do trabalho e deficiência: um estudo com cadeirantes após lesão medular

Carolina Cristina Moreira de Oliveira¹, Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7046-7456>; Adriana Ventola Marra², Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3405-0308>; Samara de Menezes Lara³, Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3384-7422>

1. Graduada em Administração pela Universidade Federal de Viçosa/Campus Florestal (UFV-CAF), Minas Gerais. Pesquisadora da Universidade Federal de Viçosa/Campus Florestal. Universidade Federal de Viçosa/MG – Brasil. E-mail: carolina.oliveira@outlook.com

2. Doutora em Administração pela Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Brasil. Professora titular do Instituto de Ciências Humanas e Sociais de Florestal da Universidade Federal de Viçosa/Campus Florestal (UFV-CAF), Minas Gerais. Professora permanente do Mestrado Profissional em Administração Pública (Profiap/UFV). Universidade Federal de Viçosa/MG – Brasil. E-mail: aventola@ufv.br

3. Mestre em Administração pela Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais e Doutoranda de Administração da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais. Pesquisadora da Universidade Federal de Viçosa/Campus Florestal (UFV/CAF), Minas Gerais. Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais - Viçosa - Minas Gerais – Brasil. E-mail: mgsamaralara@gmail.com

Abstract

The objective of this study is to understand the meanings built on work for people with acquired physical disabilities (lower limbs), usually called wheelchair users. A qualitative research was carried out in which seven subjects within this profile were interviewed in depth. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed through content analysis. The meanings related to work were grouped into: guarantee of safety, independence and autonomy; source of satisfaction; efficiency and conduction of results; maintenance of occupation and feeling of usefulness; construction of positive social relations; morally acceptable and social contribution; occupation of spaces and social representativeness; denial of the stigma of disability and effective inclusion. It was concluded that the meanings of work for wheelchair users are anchored, not only in the instrumental character, but also in the issues of space occupation, social utility and the breaking of capacitism.

Keywords: meaning of work; persons with disabilities; capacitism.

Resumo

O objetivo deste estudo é compreender os sentidos construídos sobre o trabalho para as pessoas com deficiência física adquirida (membros inferiores), usualmente chamadas de cadeirantes. Foi realizada uma pesquisa qualitativa em que foram entrevistados, em profundidade, sete sujeitos dentro deste perfil. As entrevistas foram transcritas e analisadas por meio da análise de conteúdo. Os sentidos relacionados ao trabalho foram agrupados em: garantia de segurança, independência e autonomia; fonte de satisfação; eficiência e condução de resultados; manutenção da ocupação e sentimento de utilidade; construção de relações sociais positivas; moralmente aceitável e contribuição social; ocupação de espaços e representatividade social; negação do estigma de incapacidade e inclusão efetiva. Concluiu-se que os sentidos do trabalho para os cadeirantes estão ancorados, não apenas no caráter instrumental, mas também nas questões de ocupação de espaços, de utilidade social e de quebra do capacitismo.

Palavras-chave: sentido do trabalho; pessoas com deficiência; capacitismo.

Citation: Oliveira, C.C.M., Marra, A.V., & Lara, S.M. (2023). Meaning of work and disability: a study with wheelchair users after spinal cord injury. *Gestão & Regionalidade*, 39, e20237570. <https://doi.org/10.13037/gr.vol39.e20237570>



1 Introduction

For many people with disabilities (PwD), finding and keeping a job is not a simple task. It is estimated that in Brazil, only 28.3% of individuals with disabilities, over 14 years of age, participate in the labor market, compared to 66.3% of people without disabilities (IBGE, 2022). Of this group, it is noteworthy that the participation rate in the labor market of Brazilians with physical disabilities (lower limbs) is even lower (16.9%) (IBGE, 2022). Such discrepancies were also observed in countries such as the United States, Canada and those belonging to the European Union (Bonaccio, Connelly, Gellatly, Jetha, & Martin Ginis, 2020; Leiufrud, Ruoranen, Ostermann & Reinhardt, 2016).

The need for work is not just financial. There is a relative consensus, regarding the various approaches, among scholars that work is a specific trait of human beings, being the main means by which people interact in society (Morin, 2001; Vilas-Boas & Morin, 2016; Costa, Barbosa, Rezende & Paiva, 2023). In this study, we chose to follow the conceptions of Morin (2001) about work that indicate that subjects can attribute a positive meaning to the work itself. Work is important for self-concept and self-esteem, being a source of identity, roles and social status for most people. It allows individuals to express and realize their core values, acquire new knowledge and contribute to society (Morin, Tonelli, & Pliopas, 2007; Leiufrud *et al.*; 2016; Paiva & Bendassolli, 2015; Vilas-Boas & Morin, 2016).

That said, it is noteworthy that individuals with physical disabilities tend to be more prone to the need for work (Ville & Ravaud, 1998) as a “mechanism of insertion in the social structure, an integration factor that reinforces the identity of these people” (Galvão, Lemos, & Cavazotte, 2018, p. 24). Deficiencies can be congenital or acquired. In the first, the individual, in most cases, lives with limitations in their daily lives from birth or from a very young age. Acquired can appear only in adulthood, impacting different contexts of a subject's life, because, in many cases, the disability is due to a traumatic event, which modifies the individual's view of life (Santos & Carvalho-Freitas, 2018). Although the participation in the labor market of people with acquired physical disabilities is relatively studied, the subjective experiences and meanings they attribute to their work are less widespread (Leiufrud *et al.*; 2016).

In this context, this study focuses on people with acquired physical disabilities (lower limbs), usually called wheelchair users, in order to understand the meanings, they construct about work. Even though diversity management has been presenting advances in organizations, with regard to PwD, in themes such as insertion (Moreira, Capelle, & Carvalho-Freitas, 2015) and the construction of subjectivity that permeates the stigma of capacitism, prejudice and devaluation of the skills of these individuals still persist (Ribeiro & Ribeiro, 2012). Galvão *et al.* (2018) point out the relevance of conducting research on the meanings of work of people with different disabilities, analyzing factors such as independence and autonomy based on the peculiarity of each disability. Therefore, in this article the focus was on a specific deficiency to analyze possible peculiarities.

This study can contribute, with the organizations, through the denudation of information about their experience and work context, so that the hiring of people with disabilities is not limited only to integration. In which, they only insert the subjects in the organizations, not breaking the paradigms of devaluation of subjects who escape the standard of the ideal subject, with characteristics that do not correspond to hegemonic heteronormativity (Franco, Magalhães, Paiva, & Saraiva, 2017; Freitas, 2015). But that the area of people management can develop truly inclusive practices for hiring people with disabilities, being able to inhibit or preserve inequalities, as stated by Freitas (2015). Social inclusion can be defined, then, as the process of full participation in various social domains, such as the economy and culture, ensuring income, opportunities and equitably distributed resources (Kim, Shin, Yu, & Kim., 2017). Thus, going through social ruptures and deeper changes and not only by meeting legal obligations (Pagliuca *et al.*, 2015).

2 Theoretical Background

Often, the meaning and sense of the work are treated as synonyms due to the polysemic character of the words (Tolfo & Piccinini, 2007). Bendassolli and Coelho-Lima (2015) bring meaning to work and meaning to work as individual and distinct concepts merely in the theoretical scenario, because in a social and socio-political context they are part of the same event, forming an inseparable unit. For this study, the two constructs were not considered equal, as there are significant differentiations that need to be addressed (Tolfo & Piccinini, 2007). Since, through a subjective process, meanings are transformed into meanings, where objective reality is the primordial foundation (Santos & Carvalho-Freitas, 2018).

The meaning of the work is obtained through intrinsic experiences of individuals, added to the organizational context and environment where the individual is (Morin, 2001; Rodrigues, Barrichello, Irigaray, Soares & Morin, 2017; Tolfo & Piccinini, 2007). Thus, the meaning of work is a construction of what occurs through the understanding of individual subjectivity, not being a static process, since the absorption of elements that relate to work occurs in continuous modification and resignification (Lima, Tavares, Brito & Cappelle, 2013). The meanings of work are intertwined with the biography of each one and with the way in which the meanings socially constructed about work are apprehended (Paiva; Bendassolli & Torres, 2015).

Morin (2001) presents six components that characterize meaningful work: being efficient and leading to results, delivering satisfaction to those who perform it, being morally acceptable, enabling positive human experiences, providing security and autonomy, and providing occupation. Such components were used as *a priori* categories in this research, from the perspective of contributing to the advancement of academic production in the area of administration, contemplating a group of workers little studied, taking into account a gap in the literature of new research itineraries with the theme, observing an alignment between what it proposes to discuss, theory and methods (Costa *et al.*, 2023).

Regarding the meaning of work for people with disabilities, studies identify the importance of work, on the one hand, for subsistence and financial independence, guaranteeing economic conditions, personal and family survival and, on the other hand, for personal independence, personal and professional recognition, and opportunity to return to an active and useful position in society (Carvalho-Freitas *et al.*, 2010; Lima *et al.*, 2013; Ribeiro & Ribeiro, 2012). Paiva *et al.* (2015), seeking to understand the relationships of PwD with their work, reinforced that work is perceived as a need, a source of pleasure, recognition and socialization. Thus, Santos and Carvalho-Freitas (2018) state that there are six factors that give meaning to the work of PWDs: distraction, occupation and performance of activities, independence and survival, pleasure and satisfaction, fulfillment of life, usefulness and personal appreciation. For people with acquired disabilities (motor, visual and hearing), Galvão *et al.* (2018) reinforce that work means a source of pleasure and representation, social insertion, empowerment of oneself and others, combating stigmas, overcoming barriers and breaking the myth of disability. Leiulfstrud *et al.* (2016) investigated the meaning of being employed for people with Spinal Cord Injury in six European countries. The authors did not notice significant differences between countries and stated that employment contributes to the creation of personal and collective identity and social recognition, enabling the structuring of time and the "distraction" of disability and pain.

Santos and Carvalho-Freitas (2018) state that a physical disability can be acquired for several causes, mainly due to diseases, traffic accidents or injuries caused by firearms and bladed weapons. These various causes may or may not cause a spinal cord injury. Custódio *et al.* (2009) state that spinal cord injury (SCI), mainly due to trauma, is a neurological and limiting injury, and occurs mostly in young people between 15 and 40 years old. There are two



functional categories of SCI: paraplegia and tetraplegia. Paraplegia involves partial or complete paralysis, affects the lower limbs and trunk and may affect them partially or both, resulting from lesions in the thoracic, sacral or lumbar spinal cord. Tetraplegia partially or totally affects the trunk, respiratory muscles and the four limbs (Cerezetti, Nunes, Cordeiro & Tedesco, 2012).

Studies emphasize that people with paraplegia value work more than those without injuries, and are also more likely to feel fulfilled and socially recognized for their work (Ville & Ravaud, 1998). Despite valuing work, people with paraplegia are exposed to several physical barriers, such as pain, fatigue, side effects of medications, in addition to relearning, in the case of acquired disability, to deal with tasks such as washing and dressing, as well as starting to work again (Fadyl & Mcpherson, 2010). The authors add that in the work environment other barriers are encountered: the attitudes of employers and their belief in the disability of PwD, accessibility and the type of functions performed. Barriers are also related to the person's health conditions and time constraints due to their own health, particularly with regard to full-time work (Leiulfsrud *et al.*; 2016).

When it comes to the insertion of people with disabilities in the labor market, Law No. 8,112/90 establishes the reservation of up to 20% of vacancies for PwD in public tenders and Law No. 8,213/91, called the Quota Law, provides that from 2 to 5% of job vacancies, depending on the number of employees of the company, must be destined to PwD. Even though the legislation is from the 1990s, unemployment and underemployment for PwD remain, implying negative economic, social and psychological consequences for both individuals and society in general (Lorenzo & Silva, 2017; Moreira *et al.*, 2015).

Lima *et al.* (2013) point out that it is necessary to break the social and even family view that treats PwD as dependent, unproductive, in need of special care and unable to perform a job. Franco *et al.* (2017) complement that there is prejudice in relation to PwD regarding their ability to perform the work. Such views derive from capacitism understood as “a network of beliefs, processes, and practices that produces a particular type of self and body (the bodily pattern) that is designed as perfect, species-typical, and therefore essential and fully human” (Campbell, 2001, p. 44).

Thus, despite the formal inclusion of several workers through diversity management policies and practices in organizations, subtle and continuous processes reiterate the superiority of body capacity over disability, showing that PwD are not compatible with the ideal worker ‘model’ (Jammaers & Zanoni, 2021; Kim *et al.*, 2017). Kim *et al.* (2017) state that the effective social inclusion of PwD involves the legal protection of its access to all parts of the social system, including education, employment, social services and medical care, its active participation in society, equal social relations between people with and without disabilities, and cultural values that must respect diversity and be free from prejudice.

3 Methodological Procedures

This study was based on a qualitative research of a descriptive nature, which, given the multiple meanings, beliefs, values and attitudes, enables the assimilation of processes and phenomena, understanding the subjectivity of the individuals surveyed and dealing with dimensions that cannot be quantified (Minayo; Deslandes & Gomes, 2011).

The target audience of this research is wheelchair users due to a spinal cord injury, who have some kind of relationship with work, whether in the formal or informal market or in their training. These were selected through the criteria of accessibility, convenience and availability (Vergara, 2012). The contact with the first respondents occurred through the Association of the Physically Disabled of Contagem/MG, they indicated others, following the snowball technique, in addition to contacts made through social networks. In all, twenty-two individuals were approached, of which seven were available to participate in this study.

Regarding data collection, it was decided to conduct in-depth interviews carried out individually remotely through Whereby or in person at the discretion of the interviewee's place of residence, in January and February 2020. These were guided from a semi-structured script based on the research of Morin (2001) and Morin, Tonelli and Pliopas (2007) used because it fits the objectives of this research. All interviews, with an average duration of 40 minutes, were recorded and transcribed in full, respecting the interviewees' way of speaking and using fictitious names to preserve anonymity. It is noteworthy that the participants signed the Informed Consent Form (ICF).

The data from the interviews were submitted to content analysis, carried out in three phases: pre-analysis, exploration of the material and treatment of the results (Bardin, 2006). The categories of analysis were established *a priori*, based on the characteristics of a work with the meaning of Morin (2001), namely: Guarantee of Safety, Independence and Autonomy; Source of Satisfaction; Efficiency and Conduct of Results; Maintenance of Occupation and Sense of Usefulness; Construction of Positive Social Relationships; Morally acceptable and Social Contribution. However, after data analysis, the additional categories of: Space Occupancy and Social Representativeness; Denial of disability stigma and Effective Inclusion were identified. The results are described in the following topic.

4. Presentation and Analysis of Results

4.1 Subjects of this research

The way in which each subject interprets the acquisition of a disability is related to several objective and subjective elements, such as: their individual traits; experiences and learning related to disability; socioeconomic characteristics; support and social relations; practical triggers of new limitations in daily life; opportunities and current professional achievements; period of development of the disability and the context in which the disability was acquired (Paiva *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, the following is a summary of the stories of each interviewee.

- a) **Tatiane:** 19 years old, single and lives in the city of Curitiba - PR. At the age of 14 she became a paraplegic due to a cyst in her spine. With 5 years of injury, she is a medical student and prides herself on not letting the injury stop her from pursuing her childhood dream.
- b) **Igor:** 29 years old, married, lives in Londrina/PR. He has a degree in Administration and a public servant, acting as legal advisor, in addition to providing consultancies for PwD. He started working at the age of 14 in a sign company. At 16, he started an internship in a hospital and on weekends he helped a friend in a *lan house*. At the age of 17, while working at the *lan house*, he was assaulted with a firearm, leaving him paraplegic.
- c) **Leonardo:** single, 32 years old, lives in the countryside of Bahia. At the beginning of his undergraduate degree in business administration, at the age of 18, he passed a public exam at a financial institution, which would make him move to another city. During the trip, he was in a car accident, injured his spinal cord, leaving him quadriplegic. Leonardo has a blog, which is directed to the diverse demands of people with disabilities.
- d) **Fernanda:** 33 years old, single, Brasília/DF. She has worked since she was 13 years old, was a babysitter, clerk and saleswoman. At the age of 18 she had an accident diving into a shallow pool, which injured her spinal cord and made her quadriplegic. Currently, she is a manager in a store specialized in wheelchair and graduated in Commercial Management.



- e) **Kátia:** 36 years old, married, Brasília/DF. At the age of 14, she was the victim of a stray bullet in a cafeteria, becoming paraplegic. She has a graduate degree in Constitutional Law, works as a lawyer in a few cases, as she is a public servant, occupying the position of school monitor.
- f) **Fábio:** 43 years old, married, Contagem/MG, business student. He was a motorcycle courier in a pharmacy when he had an accident at work. Works in the administrative sector of the same pharmacy and trains basketball.
- g) **Rodrigo:** 55 years old, married, Belo Horizonte/MG. Since the age of 16, she had been doing sporadic work to defray her expenses. At the age of 18, he passed a civil police exam, where he remained until the age of 24, when he suffered a car accident that injured his spinal cord, triggering quadriplegia. He works as a lawyer, in addition to being an administrative assistant at the same educational institution in which he graduated.

4.2 Characterizing meaningful work

It was noticed through the reports that the work has extreme relevance in their lives, configuring itself as an individual and unique construction, which is not fully repeated among the interviewees. However, through content analysis, it was possible to perceive that many of these constructions of meanings for work coincide and relate, being grouped into the nine categories described in the methodology.

4.2.1 Guarantee of Safety, Independence and Autonomy

Although there was no unanimity among the participants, the desire for security, independence and autonomy was recurrent in the speech of 05 of the 07 interviewees. When it comes to people with disabilities, financial autonomy looms large, because, in several aspects of life, the individual loses their autonomy, and also adds to their budget the costs related to this new health condition. This scenario is highlighted in the following speeches. “Working for me, I think it was one of my best achievements, having financial independence is the best thing especially in the life of the person with disabilities”. (Fernanda)

[...] to have financial autonomy, to be able to buy what I need, right?! It is medicine, it is being able to provide me with leisure, a better quality of life, what it is... at the time I suffered my accident my family did not have the courage to provide me. (Kátia)

It is inferred that financial autonomy is directly linked to the physical autonomy of people with low mobility. The acquisition of instruments that facilitate their mobility, such as an adapted car, a motorized wheelchair, even electronic devices, requires a lot of financial resources. Such resources can reduce the dependence on third parties, providing autonomy for the PwD to be able to move around alone in their own home, to come and go in their own car, among other activities. As we see in Igor's speech.

When I go to the supermarket and consider. and pay for my purchase and pay for my own food and drive my own car, I can only do this because I have a paid work activity. This is really cool, especially having a disability, right?! (Igor)

Autonomy portrays feelings of power, responsibility and self-sufficiency to decide about their activities and time (Galvão *et al.*, 2018; Rodrigues *et al.*, 2017). People with disabilities tend to depend financially on family members and paid activity contributes to the achievement of autonomy, since this income, in the search for an independent life, is part of the emancipation of these individuals (Lima *et al.*, 2013). From the moment an adult individual

detaches himself from his parents' home and from the matriarchal and patriarchal protective relationship, the acquisition of a disability can mean a setback in the achievements already achieved in his life project.

After you lived alone, having your independence, your autonomy, returning home as a family member was the biggest difficulty, being able to adapt to all this. Not so much the disability itself, but the lack of freedom, the lack of autonomy to do everything alone. (Leonardo)

So, when Leonardo talks about autonomy and independence, he refers to work as a means that enables the rescue of autonomy lost with acquired disability. It is inferred that this is one of the peculiarities of PwD with acquired disability, because, especially for those who underwent trauma in adulthood (Leonardo, Rodrigo, Fábio and Fernanda), they had already conquered a life independent of their parents, which had to be regained.

4.2.2 Source of Satisfaction

The characteristic focused on satisfaction is related to the pleasure and fulfillment obtained by the worker in the execution of their tasks, being a space for personal fulfillment and identification, where the positivity of the work by itself is highlighted (Morin, 2001; Santos & Carvalho-Freitas, 2018). Rodrigo brings the importance of this satisfaction, in addition to the instrumental issue, as a primary factor.

That occupation gives me pleasure, it gives meaning to me, it is what I talk about occupational justice, you are exercising an activity as a disabled person that gives pleasure, that brings meaning to your life. It's not just the money you'll get at the end of the month, but also because you liked it. (Rodrigo)

For Morin *et al.* (2007) a tedious work has no meaning. When the participants of this study were asked what meaningless work consists of, they reinforced this definition. "A job that makes no sense that you can't do anything, right?! That you don't... don't... don't... you can be happy with him, that he can't provide you with well-being, neither for you nor for other people." (Kátia)

Satisfaction comes when the subject's interests and skills meet the premises requested by the function performed, as well as when it is stimulating and provides challenges (Galvão, Lemos, & Cavazotte, 2018; Morin, 2001). Regarding the hiring of people with disabilities, companies tend to offer vacancies in operational positions, in activities with low complexity and that demand a lower level of education (Lorenzo & Silva, 2017; Moreira *et al.*, 2015). Rodrigo's account exemplifies this situation:

As an administrative assistant in this sector I feel a little bit is... not that I'm dissatisfied. Because I see that in the case of people with disabilities, [...] they do not check how committed they are to work. [...] Even if she has good professional training [...], and even then her activity will be limited. (Rodrigo)

Rodrigo's statements corroborate the findings of Kim *et al.* (2017) and Jammaers and Zanoni (2021), following the ideas of capacitism, managers organize their workforce based on the dichotomy between non-disabled/disabled employees, understanding that the ideal worker is the non-disabled one. Based on this logic, it is not necessary for managers to verify whether disabled workers are committed to work and whether they are highly qualified, because even if

they are not, they should not be dismissed under the legislation, and they are considered “useful” for companies to comply with quotas.

4.2.3 Efficiency and Results Driving

Labor is also seen as a mechanism of insertion in the production-consumption circuit and is reflected in the capitalist production model within the subjectivities of individuals (Santos & Carvalho-Freitas, 2018). Rodrigo sees the result of his work in the possibility of access to what he calls the means of production: “Work for me is to feel productive, entering the Marxist vision, but having access to the means of production. ” Igor already brings a perception that his delivery of results goes through an adaptation of his work to his skills.

I can't organize the file of the office I work in, but I can think of solutions so that whoever will organize it, I can do it in a smart way. So I feel very happy... For finding an activity that I can deliver my best. (Igor)

For a person with acquired disabilities, realizing that their workforce can deliver efficient results reinforces that these individuals can be productive even with the physical and organizational barriers encountered, corroborating Fadyl and Mcpherson (2010). The acquisition of a disability can at first limit many actions and interrupt many projects, so carrying out work that is consistent with their professional skills and interests is a job that makes sense for the interviewees, reinforcing the statements of Leiulfsrud *et al.* (2016).

4.3.4 Occupation Maintenance and Sense of Utility

Through a structuring of time, the work keeps the subjects occupied, thus allowing the composition of life and the individual's history, through routine (Morin, 2001). This occupation frees the worker from idleness, seen in a negative context (Santos & Carvalho-Freitas, 2018). Leonardo reports the role that work occupies in his life: “[Work is] a way of not let the mind be idle. Mainly, we are quadriplegic, or even paraplegic, sometimes without much to do, and the work, it brings this rush, to conquer things, to meet people.” (Leonardo)

Leonardo's speech reinforces the findings of Santos and Carvalho-Freitas (2018) and Leiulfsrud *et al.* (2016) who associate work with occupation, distraction, carrying out activities and fulfilling life. Without the work, he considers that “there is not much to do,” so the work fills this void.”It is a need, to bring me a movement , to return the movement that the injury somehow robbed me of. So work has that meaning for me. Of... of setting my life in motion.” (Igor)

According to Leonardo and Igor, work is an opportunity to occupy the mind and to be in movement, in line with the literature on the relationship between work and personal and professional recognition, with a feeling of usefulness and power to act (Carvalho-Freitas *et al.*, 2010; Ribeiro & Ribeiro, 2012; Lima *et al.*, 2013). In Igor's report, one of the peculiarities of the person with acquired disability is also evidenced, the feeling that his movement was stolen by LM, and that it is the work that manages to return this movement.

4.2.5 Building Positive Social Relationships

PwD are more likely to feel fulfilled and socially recognized for their work (Ville & Ravaud, 1998). Kátia and Fernanda emphasize a positivity in interactions with their co-workers and clients, implying the perception of recognition of their work for the adjustments made in the work environment and for the personal relationships built in this environment. It is noteworthy that Fernanda works in a store specialized in wheelchairs, so when she talks

about her interactions with customers, many are also wheelchair users, which ends up creating a collective identity, as highlighted in the study by Leiulfsrud *et al.* (2016). “The colleagues here they have always respected a lot. They have always sought to adapt to my limitations. [...] They sought to provide an accessible environment for me, so that I could perform the tasks.” (Kátia) “It’s an audience that I really like. I really love working here and that we understand each other. [...] Thus, I end up gaining a lot of friends, not just customers.” (Fernanda)

I have a sector there that has 5, 6 people, sometimes the answer they [students] could pick up with any of the others there. But no, “Rodrigo will solve this for me.” Got it?! I see that I have a meaning, an importance in that sector that I work in, [...] And then I see it as the best of all, when you see this recognition. (Rodrigo)

Rodrigo also feels recognized in his interaction with students who prefer him to solve some problem for them to the detriment of his other co-workers. In these social interactions, bonds are built that offer an escape from the sense of isolation that appears in some cases (Galvão *et al.*, 2018). Thus, it is noted that working with feeling (Morin, 2001) for Kátia, Fernanda and Rodrigo permeates positive human experiences, with the possibility of providing them with social reintegration, since after the acquisition of their disabilities many interactions are extinguished.

4.3.6 Morally Acceptable and Social Contribution

Morally accepted work is that which brings a responsible social contribution, where the individual's personal interests can be ignored due to an expressive cause (Morin, 2001). Contributing socially was a representative part of the discourse of the interviewees in this study.

What I want to leave for the whole society, for readers, for collaborators... is this legacy that the blog will leave with time. I don't know if it will last forever, I don't know if it will continue after me, but I think it's word is legacy. (Leonardo)

The feeling of belonging even in a society, right?! The possibility of being better and delivering something important to society, right?! [...] in addition to being useful to the organization in which you are working, you really work to make society a better place. (Igor)

Both Igor and Leonardo carry out occupations focused on PwD (legal advice and blog). Both have the understanding that their work is part of building something bigger. They emphasize their ability to contribute to a “better society” and free of prejudices, leaving a “legacy” that will serve to break down organizational barriers (Fadyl & Mcpherson, 2010) arising, for the most part, from beliefs arising from capacitism (Campbell, 2001; Kim *et al.*, 2017; Jammaers & Zanoni, 2021).

4.3.7 Occupation of Spaces and Social Representativeness

Respondents also report that meaningful work is related to the occupation of social spaces, in an attempt to reduce capacitism (Campbell, 2001; Kim *et al.*, 2017; Jammaers & Zanoni, 2021), corroborating Galvão *et al.* (2018) who deal with representativeness as a source of pleasure.

The point is not to feel excluded from society, that's basically it. And also show people who do not have a disability that they end up getting used to [...] they end up knowing and seeing that it is not as big an obstacle as they imagined. [...]. Several people have already spoken, they have already reported this to me: "I had another vision". (Fábio)

The presence is the most determining factor for this change, it is our presence. If it's to bother, it's okay [...]. It's not easy, look at the historical construction that went until the term disabled person arrived. (Rodrigo)

Fábio makes explicit the importance of people living with PwD and knowing more about disability to break the paradigm of capacitism. Rodrigo states that in this search it is necessary to be seen, to constantly seek to be included. However, this process is not simple, it can "bother", it takes time, persistence and openness of society for changes to occur. For these reasons, it is essential for PwD to be present in social spaces. And when this social space is the work environment, work makes more sense.

4.3.8 Denial of disability stigma

Corroborating Lima *et al.* (2013), Franco *et al.* (2017) and Galvão *et al.* (2018) the fight against the stigma of disability, that is, capacitism is one of the main factors that gives meaning to work for PwD. In Igor, Fernanda and Tatiane's reports show the fear of prejudice arising from capacitism and the expectation that educational training and work break such beliefs. "When you have your own money, you don't... you don't feel pitty about yourself anymore." (Fernanda)

I will not be less a doctor because I am in a wheelchair [...] that my chair is not seen as a problem. We know that there is prejudice there, we know that there is this whole process. But I hope you don't see my wheelchair, but my person and my background. (Tatiane)

It's really cool when you can be in charge of your own accounts. This is really cool, especially having a disability, right?! We listen when we have a disability, which we will never be able to own, responsible right?! For life itself. (Igor)

This view, that the disabled person is incapable, is enhanced in relation to people with spinal cord injury since there is a great loss of mobility and initially, until the completion of the rehabilitation process, great dependence is created. The feeling of pity deposited when the subject acquires this disability, in the case of spinal cord injury, is anchored in the perception that the individual will no longer be complete. And getting a job is a dilutor of this stigma, as if the job socially proves the disabled person's ability to answer for themselves.

4.3.9 Effective Inclusion

In the insertion of PwD in the labor market, the capacitist view appears in two extremes of a continuum: those that are taken as an example of overcoming, as dedicated individuals, with practices that should be copied by other colleagues; and those that are seen as a group that needs constant assistance, losing its productive capacity, and that is there only because of the quota policy (Vasconcelos, 2010). You can see both scenarios in the excerpts. "People sometimes greatly underestimate people with disabilities or even overestimate them too, right?! As if they saw themselves as a superhero, as the guy who has to understand everything". (Igor) "“He knows he's here to fulfill his quota.” I've heard that and it's a very prejudiced view. [...]"

people with disabilities are treated in a way, as if it were a favor that society, in theory, would be doing.” (Rodrigo)

Both situations are detrimental to the work of the person with a disability. The view of PwD as an example to be followed tends to put pressure on the individual too much and unnecessarily. And the underestimation of people based on the beliefs of capacitism, stating that the PwD should feel grateful to society for employment and the existence of quotas, as stated by Kim *et al.* (2017) and Jammaers and Zanoni (2021). Leonardo brings us an example where it is possible to see the duality in the work of the wheelchair user.

This week we posted that there was a wheelchair user doing Uber Eats there in São Paulo. And then, on the one hand I look and ‘wow, what a cool guy, the guy is fighting there, he has to pay the bills’. But, on the other hand, you look and say, ‘man that wasn’t supposed to be happening’. (Leonardo)

It is noteworthy here, a point of the quota law that directly affects the participants of this study. The legislation provides for the hiring of people with any type of disabilities and it is clear that there is a “predilection” of employers to choose candidates with less severe disabilities, that is, those who require lower adaptation costs. Studies indicate that employers prefer people with “invisible” disabilities, such as hearing impairment or the absence of a finger, for example (Bonaccio *et al.*, 2020). This fact is evidenced in IBGE's own data (2022) when it informs that the participation in the labor market of PwD, in general, is 28.3% and of those with physical disabilities (lower limbs) is 16.9%. The reports of Fernanda who works in a store that sells wheelchairs and Rodrigo who is a lawyer reflect this issue. “I did several interviews in several companies and I was never called, not by quota, not by anything. I never had an opportunity to show my work, which I could add to the company.” (Fernanda)

If I came to do an interview and was a mechanical engineer and was a wheelchair user. And come along with me, a mechanical turner, he missing a finger. Which of the two would be hired by the company? [...] the turner would be chosen, because you would not need to make adaptations in the bathroom, accessibility routes [...]. What I see is simply to say, in the case of the quota law, look, did you present the ICD code? Okay, you met your quota. (Rodrigo)

Regarding the quota law within the public sector, there is an apparently less exclusive scenario, since the vacancies, in addition to having a higher percentage reserved, are filled through a public tender. From the report of Igor, who is a public servant, the greatest opportunity for inclusion in the public service is inferred because the selection happens objectively by a written test that measures his technical knowledge and that does not go through the subjectivity of an interviewer. This inference corroborates with Bonaccio *et al.* (2020) who state that PwD tend to prefer public to private jobs, as they understand that in the former the probabilities of discriminatory employment practices are lower.

If you have a position, for the judge, you have to have this percentage for the person with disabilities. [...] The first step is the form of admission, that the opportunities are much greater because you do not have to prove anything to anyone to enter the public service. Just be able and pass the test. (Igor)

Finally, the importance of legislation for the insertion of people with disabilities in the labor market is known, but it is necessary to reinforce that the mechanism is not about charity

and that they have proven to be ineffective or ineffective. Thus, there is a distance from real inclusion, which points to the need for the effective implementation of inclusion actions in the public and private spheres (Plagiuca *et al.*, 2015). Freitas (2015) has already pointed out that one of the difficulties in establishing public policies that promote the inclusion of PwD in the work environment is to rethink issues involving the equivalence of disabilities and the extent of disability (mild or severe).

5. Final remarks

The objective of this study is to understand the meanings built on work for people with acquired physical disabilities (lower limbs), usually called wheelchair users. The meanings of work for the researched PwD were grouped into nine categories: 1) The guarantee of safety, independence and autonomy, which is related to work to enable the rescue of the autonomy lost with the acquired disability; 2) Source of satisfaction associated with the pleasure of working that goes beyond the instrumental, but there are also issues related to capacitism with differentiation between disabled and non-disabled workers; 3) Efficiency and conduction of results related to perception that can perform activities with deliveries of efficient results despite the physical and organizational barriers faced after the acquisition of the disability; 4) Maintenance of occupation and feeling of usefulness with work, as a source of occupation and a way of feeling in movement; 5) Construction of positive social relations, in the establishment of bonds that offer an escape from the feeling of isolation; 6) Morally acceptable and social contribution, linked to work that offers the opportunity to engage in expressive causes; 7) Occupation of spaces and social representation, represents feeling at work the possibility of fighting against the empowerment through insertion in social spaces; 8) Denial of the stigma of disability, the fight against it, gives meaning to work; and 9) Effective inclusion, goes through compliance with the legislation for the insertion of people with disabilities in the labor market so that they find work environments conducive to being productive.

These findings corroborate the literature, which presents similar realities for PwD, especially with regard to capacitism. From these results, it is possible to perceive the need to contemplate people management policies and practices to change the vision of capacitism and carry out the true inclusion of the subjects of this research, influencing the meaning of work. Thus, this study can offer, from a theoretical-conceptual point of view, information about the perception of this group of workers in relation to the work they perform and the meaning they give to it, contributing to the possibility of new discussions about their work reality. From a pragmatic point of view, the perception of the interviewees of the permanence of capacitism, which is consistent with recent research, and affects the meaning of work, suggests that the insertion of PwD in organizations needs to be rethought, through reformulations of the Quota Laws and the organizations' people management practices. From a political-social point of view, the information in this study can contribute to guide the negotiations of more effective conjunctures in relation to the inspection of compliance with quotas and their true integration after entering the organization, especially for wheelchair users.

Despite its contributions, this study has some limitations due to the difficulty of finding individuals who suffered a spinal cord injury, who were on the market after the trauma with availability to participate in the research. Another aspect to be reported is that the reality of the respondents being graduates or undergraduates does not match the reality of most PwD, which can affect their perception of the meanings of work.

Finally, it is suggested as an agenda for future research: i) studies that contemplate the meanings attributed to work for people with congenital and acquired disabilities; ii) comparison studies, considering education, sex, age, income, occupation, insertion through quotas or not, in order to identify the influence of these aspects on the meanings perceived at work. It is noteworthy that the stronger investigation of these issues can lead to a greater understanding of

subjective dimensions, as well as objective aspects of individuals with disabilities, in addition to being able to improve the understanding of how such particularities influence perceptions about work.

References

- Bardin, L. (2006). *Análise de conteúdo*. Lisboa: Edições 70.
- Bendassolli, P. F., & Coelho-Lima, F. (2015). Psicologia e trabalho informal: a perspectiva dos processos de significação. *Psicologia & Sociedade*, 27, 383-393.
- Bonaccio, S., Connelly, C. E., Gellatly, I. R., Jetha, A., & Martin Ginis, K. A. (2020). The participation of people with disabilities in the workplace across the employment cycle: Employer concerns and research evidence. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 35, 135-158.
- Campbell, F. A. (2001). Inciting legal fictions-disability's date with ontology and the abieist body of the law. *Griffith L. Rev.*, 10, 42.
- Carvalho-Freitas, M. N. D., Toledo, I. D. Á., Nepomuceno, M. F., Suzano, J. D. C. C., & Almeida, L. A. D. (2010). Socialização organizacional de pessoas com deficiência. *Revista de Administração de Empresas*, 50, 264-275.
- Cerezetti, C. R. N., Nunes, G. R., Cordeiro, D. R. C. L., & Tedesco, S. (2012). Lesão medular traumática e estratégias de enfrentamento: revisão crítica. *O mundo da Saúde*, 36(2), 318-326.
- Costa, S. D. M., Barbosa, J. K. D., Rezende, A. F., & Paiva, K. C. M. (2023). The Meanings of Work for Young Workers: An analysis with apprentices in the metropolitan region of Belo Horizonte. *Revista Gestão & Conexões*, 12(1), 106–126.
- Custódio, N. R. O., et al. (2009). Spinal cord injury at the Rehabilitation and Readaptation Center Dr. Henrique Santillo (CRER). *Column/Columna*, 8(3), 265-268.
- Fadyl, J. K., & McPherson, K. M. (2010). Understanding decisions about work after spinal cord injury. *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*, 20, 69-80.
- Franco, D. S., Magalhães, A. F., de Paiva, K. C. M., & Saraiva, L. A. S. (2017). Entre a inserção e a inclusão de minorias nas organizações: uma análise crítica sob o olhar de jovens trabalhadores. *Revista Economia & Gestão*, 17(48), 43-61.
- Freitas, M. E. (2015). Contexto, políticas públicas e práticas empresariais no tratamento da diversidade no Brasil. *Revista Interdisciplinar de gestão social*, 4(3), 87-135.
- Galvao, M. F., Lemos, A. H. D. C., & Cavazotte, F. D. S. (2018). Revisiting the mainstream: The meaning of work for people with acquired disabilities. *RAM. Revista de Administração Mackenzie*, 19. (spe), eRAMD180079.



- IBGE. (2022). People with Disabilities and Social Inequalities in Brazil. Population and Social Coordination's Indicators. Retrieved from <https://www.ibge.gov.br/estatisticas/sociais/populacao/34889-pessoas-com-deficiencia-e-as-desigualdades-sociais-no-brasil.html?=&t=resultados>
- Jammaers, E., & Zanoni, P. (2021). The identity regulation of disabled employees: Unveiling the 'varieties of ableism' in employers' socio-ideological control. *Organization Studies*, 42(3), 429-452.
- Kim, K. M., Shin, Y. R., Yu, D. C., & Kim, D. K. (2017). The meaning of social inclusion for people with disabilities in South Korea. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 64(1), 19-32.
- Law No. 8,112, of December 11, 1990. (1990). Provides for the legal regime of civil servants of the Union. Retrieved from https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/leis/18112cons.htm
- Law No. 8,213, of July 24, 1991 (1991) Provides for Social Security Benefit Plans and other measures. Retrieved from https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/leis/18213cons.htm
- Leiulfstrud, A. S., Ruoranen, K., Ostermann, A., & Reinhardt, J. D. (2016). The meaning of employment from the perspective of persons with spinal cord injuries in six European countries. *Work*, 55(1), 133-144.
- Lima, M. P. D., Tavares, N. V., Brito, M. J., & Cappelle, M. C. A. (2013). O sentido do trabalho para pessoas com deficiência. *RAM. Revista de Administração Mackenzie*, 14, 42-68.
- Lorenzo, S. M., & Silva, N. R. (2017). Hiring People with Disabilities in Companies from the Perspective of Human Resources Professionals. *Revista Brasileira de Educação Especial*, 23(3), 345-360.
- Minayo, M. C., Deslandes, S. F., & Gomes, R. (2011). Social research: theory, methodology and creativity. Editora Vozes Ltda, 25th ed.
- Moreira, L. B., Cappelle, M. C. A., & Carvalho-Freitas, M. N. A. (2015). Dinâmica Identitária de Pessoas com Deficiência: um estudo no Brasil e no Estados Unidos. *RAM. Revista de Administração Mackenzie*, 16(1), 40-61.
- Morin, E. (2001). The meanings of work. *Revista de Administração de Empresas*, 41(3), 8-19.
- Morin, E., Tonelli, M. J., & Pliopas, A. L. V. (2007). O trabalho e seus sentidos. *Psicologia & sociedade*, 19, 47-56.
- Pagliuca, L. M. F., Mariano, M. R., Oliveira, P. M. P. D., Oliveira, M. G. D., França, I. S. X. D., & Almeida, P. C. D. (2015). Repercussão de políticas públicas inclusivas segundo análise das pessoas com deficiência. *Escola Anna Nery*, 19, 498-504.
- Paiva, J. C. M., Bendassolli, P. F., & Torres, C. C. (2015). Sentidos e significados do trabalho: dos impedimentos às possibilidades do trabalho de pessoas com deficiências. *Estudos e Pesquisas em Psicologia*, 15(1), 218-239.

- Ribeiro, M. A., & Ribeiro, F. (2012). O desenvolvimento da carreira de pessoas com deficiência em empresas: dificuldades e perspectivas. *Gerais: Revista Interinstitucional de Psicologia*, 5(1), 127-145.
- Rodrigues, A. L., Barrichello, A., Irigaray, H. A. R., Soares, D. R., & Morin, E. M. (2017). O trabalho e seus sentidos: um estudo com peritos criminais da Polícia Federal. *Revista de Administração Pública*, 51, 1058-1084.
- Santos, J. C., & Carvalho-Freitas, M. N. D. (2018). Sentidos do trabalho para pessoas com deficiência adquirida. *Psicologia & Sociedade*, 30, 1-11.
- Tolfo, S. D. R., & Piccinini, V. (2007). Sentidos e significados do trabalho: explorando conceitos, variáveis e estudos empíricos brasileiros. *Psicologia & Sociedade*, 19, 38-46.
- Vasconcelos, F. D. (2010). O trabalhador com deficiência e as práticas de inclusão no mercado de trabalho de Salvador, Bahia. *Revista Brasileira de Saúde Ocupacional*, 35, 41-52.
- Vergara, S. C. (2012). *Métodos de pesquisa em administração*. Atlas.
- Vilas-Boas, A. A. V., & Morin, E. M. (2016). Sentido do trabalho e fatores de qualidade de vida no trabalho: a percepção de professores brasileiros e canadenses. *Revista Alcance*, 23(3 (Jul-Set)), 272-292.
- Ville, I., & Ravaud, J. F. (1998). Work values: a comparison of non-disabled persons with persons with paraplegia. *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 20(4), 127-137.

