

The psychodynamic clinic and the analysis of suffering at work

Abstract

The main objective of this reflection article is to present some basic ideas about the real, symbolic and imaginary possibilities of a psychodynamic clinic of work as a perspective of analysis of the subjective experience of suffering in contemporary work from the proposal of the French psychoanalyst Christophe Dejours, in order to contribute to the conceptual understanding and practical intervention of subjective suffering in work contexts.

Keywords: work clinic, organizational psychology, psychodynamics, suffering and subjective discomfort

Volume 14 Issue 1 - 2023

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Received: January 06, 2023 | **Published:** January 17, 2023

Introduction

The subjective experience of suffering at work has been studied mainly by the French psychoanalyst.¹⁻⁵ This proposal for analysis and intervention in the field of work organization and its effects on labor subjectivity,⁶⁻⁹ 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,¹⁰⁻¹³ has neglected the investigation of the subjective aspects involved in work,^{14,15} and the subjective discomfort derived from said work.¹⁶⁻¹⁸ 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.¹⁹⁻²¹

Work clinics

According to Orejuela,²² 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,²³ 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.^{1,24} 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,²⁵ 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 Gualejac and Bendassolli. According to Bendassolli,²⁶ 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.

Psychodynamic work clinic

For Dejours,^{1,27-30} 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 time³¹⁻³³ 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.^{34,35}

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,³⁰ 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.

Dejours¹ 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,²⁸ 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,²² 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's²² 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.³⁶

For their part, Fleury and Macedo,³⁷ 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,³⁷ 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".²⁰ 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,²² 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".

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".¹ 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" by Dejours, mental illness, psychopathology could be a destination in which suffering could derive, but not necessarily, if defense strategies have been effective.

Conclusion

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. 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.

Acknowledgments

None.

Conflicts of interest

None.

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