THE MEANINGS OF WORK FOR URBAN BUS DRIVERS

OS SENTIDOS DO TRABALHO PARA MOTORISTAS DE ÔNIBUS URBANO

EL SIGNIFICADO DEL TRABAJO PARA CONDUCTORES DE AUTOBUSES URBANOS

ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aims to analyze the meanings attributed to work by urban bus drivers who work in large cities.

Design/methodology/approach: A qualitative research was conducted with the participation of 22 drivers from the same bus company in the city of Rio de Janeiro. Data were obtained from semi-structured interviews and analyzed using content analysis, with the support of Atlas.ti software.

Results: The results showed that remuneration, considered relatively high for the level of education required, and the pleasure of driving were the main aspects that give meaning to the drivers' work. Furthermore, it was found that work has high centrality, but is less important than family for most participants. Differences were also identified between mature and younger drivers. Although everyone seems to enjoy their profession, mature drivers show that they like the work more and feel more recognized when compared to their younger colleagues.

Practical implications: As a practical contribution, the results may guide the development of human resource management policies and practices that foster a more positive work experience.

Theoretical implications: The research contributes to the national literature on the meaning of work, by bringing the perspectives of bus drivers, a group that have received relatively little attention.

Limitations: The research involved bus drivers from the same company, which may have limited a greater diversity of perspectives.

Originality/value: The present study fills a gap in the national literature on the meaning of work, usually focused on professions with higher social status.

Keywords: Meaning of work. Bus drivers. Work. Mature workers. Young workers.

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RESUMO

Objetivo: O presente estudo tem por objetivo analisar os sentidos atribuídos ao trabalho por motoristas de ônibus urbano que atuam em grandes cidades.

Design/metodologia/abordagem: Foi conduzida uma pesquisa de natureza qualitativa com a participação de 22 motoristas de uma empresa de ônibus do município do Rio de Janeiro. Os dados foram obtidos a partir de entrevistas semiestruturadas e examinados por meio de análise de conteúdo, com apoio do *software* Atlas.ti.

Resultados: Os resultados mostraram que a remuneração, considerada relativamente elevada para o nível de escolaridade exigido, e o prazer de dirigir são os principais aspectos que conferem sentido ao trabalho. Além disso, observou-se que o trabalho tem alta centralidade, mas é menos importante do que a família para a maioria dos participantes. Também foram identificadas diferenças entre motoristas maduros e jovens. Apesar de todos afirmarem que gostam da profissão, os maduros demonstram gostar mais do trabalho e se sentem mais reconhecidos, quando comparados aos mais jovens.

Implicações práticas: Como contribuição prática, os resultados podem orientar o desenvolvimento de políticas e práticas de gestão de pessoas que promovam uma experiência de trabalho mais positiva.

Implicações teóricas: A pesquisa contribui para a literatura nacional sobre sentidos do trabalho, ao trazer as perspectivas de motoristas de ônibus, grupo relativamente pouco pesquisado.

Limitações: A pesquisa contou com a participação de motoristas da mesma empresa, aspecto que pode ter limitado uma maior diversidade de perspectivas.

Originalidade/valor: O presente estudo preenche uma lacuna nos estudos nacionais sobre sentidos do trabalho, usualmente focados em profissões de maior status social.

Palavras-chave: Sentido do trabalho. Motoristas de ônibus. Trabalho. Trabalhadores maduros. Jovens trabalhadores.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: Este estudio tiene como objetivo analizar los significados atribuidos al trabajo por los conductores de autobuses urbanos que trabajan en las grandes ciudades.

Diseño/metodología/enfoque: Se realizó una investigación cualitativa con la participación de 22 conductores de una misma empresa de autobuses de la ciudad de Río de Janeiro. Los datos fueron obtenidos de entrevistas semiestructuradas y analizados mediante análisis de contenido, con el apoyo del software Atlas.ti.

Resultados: Los resultados mostraron que la remuneración, considerada relativamente alta para el nivel de educación requerido, y el placer de conducir fueron los principales aspectos que dan sentido al trabajo. Además, se observó que el trabajo tiene una alta centralidad, pero es menos importante que la familia para la mayoría de los participantes. También se identificaron diferencias entre conductores maduros y jóvenes. Aunque todos indican que les gusta la profesión, los conductores maduras demuestran que les gusta más el trabajo y se sienten más reconocidas en comparación con sus compañeros más jóvenes.

Implicaciones prácticas: Como contribución práctica, los resultados pueden orientar el desarrollo de políticas y prácticas de gestión de personas que contribuyan a una experiencia laboral más positiva.

Implicaciones teóricas: La investigación contribuye a la literatura nacional sobre los significados del trabajo, al traer las perspectivas de los conductores de autobuses, un grupo relativamente poco investigado.

Limitaciones: La investigación contó con la participación de conductores de una misma empresa, aspecto que puede haber limitado una mayor diversidad de perspectivas.

Originalidad/valor: El estudio llena un vacío en los estudios nacionales sobre los significados del trabajo, generalmente centrados en profesiones con mayor estatus social.

Palabras clave: Significado del trabajo. Conductores de autobus. Trabajo. Trabajadores maduros. Trabajadores jóvenes.

INTRODUCTION

The profession of urban bus driver involves daily challenges. These drivers operate vehicles that are often poorly maintained, exposed to heat and inadequate ergonomic conditions, in frequently chaotic traffic. Additionally, they must deal directly with passengers, making this activity stressful and draining (Battiston, Cruz, & Hoffmann, 2006; Matos, Moraes, & Pereira, 2015; Nascimento, Neves, Vasconcelos, Alferes, Abreu, & Demier, 2015). At the same time, driving can be perceived as a pleasurable activity and, through their work, the bus driver provides a service to the community (Alcantara, Silva, Pereira, & Silva, 2016; Nascimento et al., 2015; Silveira, Abreu, & Santos, 2014).

Given the peculiarities of this activity, the question arises as to the meanings that bus drivers attribute to their work. In the literature on the subject, various conceptualizations and approaches can be found (Bendassolli & Godin, 2014; Coutinho, 2009; Neves, Nascimento, Felix, Silva, & Andrade, 2018; Spinelli-de-Sá & Lemos, 2017; Tolfo & Piccinini, 2007). For this study, the meaning of work is defined as a socio-historical construction, produced by individuals from their daily experiences (Coutinho, 2009; Tolfo & Piccinini, 2007).

Thus, the present study aimed to analyze the meanings of work for bus drivers in large cities. To achieve this goal, a qualitative and exploratory approach was chosen, involving 22 bus drivers from a passenger transport company in the municipality of Rio de Janeiro. In selecting the subjects, we chose male drivers and, with the aim of broadening the diversity of perspectives, we sought younger drivers who started the profession relatively early and mature drivers who joined the profession after other work experiences.

With this study, we seek to fill a gap in the Brazilian academic literature on the subject. According to Spinelli-de-Sá and Lemos (2017, p. 1), "a significant part of the research investigates the meaning of work for less conventional professions, with few studies aimed at understanding the theme from the point of view of traditional professional categories, indicating a field of research to be explored in Brazil."

Moreover, there is a bias towards professions of higher social status, such as executives (Coda & Fonseca, 2004), higher education professors (Irigaray et al., 2019; Kern et al., 2023; Petri, Gallon, & Vaz, 2019) and bank managers (Silva, Costa, Freitas, & Salles, 2019). It is also worth noting the growing academic interest in app drivers (e.g., André, Silva, & Nascimento, 2019; Vaclavik & Pithan, 2018), relative to the more traditional work of bus drivers, who also provide an important service in the context of mobility in large cities.

From a practical standpoint, we hope that insights into the perspectives and challenges bus drivers encounter in their work may guide urban passenger transport companies to implement management adjustments. These changes could benefit both the drivers and their organizations, while also contributing to the safety of passengers, pedestrians, and other road users. As Blustein, Lysova, and Duffy (2023, p. 290) highlight, the various transformations in the world of work highlight the importance of "advancing knowledge on how work is experienced by individuals."

The article is structured in five parts, including this introduction. The next section presents a review of the relevant literature, and the third addresses the research methodology. The fourth section is dedicated to the presentation and discussion of the results. Finally, section five contains the final considerations, including contributions, limitations, and suggestions for future studies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Bus Driver's Work

The work of urban bus drivers is filled with challenges. Researchers from various fields have been analyzing the problems these workers face in their daily lives. A comprehensive review of the international literature conducted by Tse, Flin, and Mearns (2006) identified a set of stressors associated with bus drivers' work, categorized into aspects related to the environment, work design, and organizational demands. The authors also identified a range of negative consequences, including physical, mental, and behavioral problems, as well as negative impacts on the organization (Tse et al., 2006). A study conducted

with urban bus drivers in Taiwan showed that role overload and lack of organizational support are the factors that most influence the emotional exhaustion of these workers (Chen & Hsu, 2020). The conflict between professional and personal life also appears to negatively affect them (Chen & Hsu, 2020; Lannoo & Erhofstadt, 2016).

In Brazil, this professional category has also attracted the attention of researchers. However, a search of the Spell and SciELO Brazil electronic databases in May 2024 revealed a growing focus on app drivers compared to the more traditional work of bus drivers, as previously noted. In the Spell database, of the 47 papers containing the words "driver" or "drivers" in the abstract, four focus on bus drivers, 13 involve app drivers, and five address truck drivers – while the remainder deal with other topics such as logistics, tourism, etc. A similar trend was observed in the SciELO Brazil database, with a slightly higher presence of studies on truck drivers. The research on bus drivers in discussed next.

The study by Nascimento et al. (2015) with bus drivers from the municipality of Rio de Janeiro revealed that working conditions and relationship with passengers are sources of stress. Similarly, the research by Matos et al. (2015) with bus drivers in Belo Horizonte (MG) showed that causes of stress are, in order of importance, slow traffic, the large number of vehicles on the road, limited time to complete trips, and confrontational relationships with passengers.

Silveira et al. (2014) conducted research with bus drivers in Natal (RN) and identified several problematic aspects, including traffic, travel time, road conditions, vehicle maintenance, the physical environment, and relationships with supervisors. The study also revealed that these factors negatively affect both the personal lives of these professionals and the quality of service they provide. Conversely, the enjoyment of driving and positive relationships with colleagues were found to enhance their work experience (Silveira et al., 2014). Similarly, the drivers studied by Nascimento et al. (2015) reported experiencing some degree of personal satisfaction in their work, despite the high levels of stress.

Some studies have aimed to evaluate the quality of life of bus drivers. Gnoatto, Maschio,

Danette, Zawadzki, and Teston (2022), in their research with bus drivers from Chapecó (SC), identified positive correlations between well-being at work and overall quality of life. Similarly, Alcantara et al. (2016) found that the health and quality of life of drivers in Rio de Janeiro are negatively influenced by their working conditions, including passenger behavior and ergonomic factors. However, the study also showed that drivers perceive positive aspects, such as engaging in work they enjoy and providing an essential service. Additionally, family emerged as a crucial source of support in coping with the challenges of their work.

Battiston et al. (2006, p. 341) conducted an analysis of the working conditions and health of bus drivers in Florianópolis (SC). The study, which included 21 drivers, revealed that they experience both physical and mental strains. Traffic emerged as a significant challenge, with drivers contending with "poorly maintained roads, traffic jams, poorly located boarding and disembarking points, other vehicles, and traffic regulations". Furthermore, the psychological pressure exerted by passenger and company surveillance, coupled with the responsibility for passenger safety and bus integrity, was also highlighted in the findings.

The work by Santos Junior, Marques, Lima, and Paiva (2022) focused on the inclusion process of female bus drivers from Fortaleza (CE). On one hand, strict work norms contribute to enhancing their sense of inclusion; on the other hand, participants also emphasized the lack of concrete actions in this regard, along with prejudice.

Finally, the study by Oliveira and Pinheiro (2007) aimed to investigate indicators associated with bus drivers' involvement in traffic accidents. The research included 457 drivers from three public transport companies in the city of Natal (RN). Of these, 55% reported having been involved in traffic accidents in the past five years. Factors associated with accident involvement included overtime, passenger complaints, time pressure, lack of sleep, and family issues.

The reality depicted in these studies raises the question of the meaning urban bus drivers attribute to their work. The literature review on the subject, presented below, indicated a gap that we seek to fill with the present study.

Meanings of Work

Studies on the meanings of work show that the concept is multidisciplinary and has been researched from different perspectives, generating diverse viewpoints. As emphasized by Andrade, Tolfo, and Dellagnelo (2012, p. 202), "significance and meanings of work are multifaceted, consisting of personal and social variables, which have been investigated by authors from different areas and in different countries."

In this regard, it is important to note that significance (or meaningfulness) and meaning of work are related but distinct concepts. According to the authors, "the meanings of work can be understood as collectively constructed in a given historical, economic, and social context, while the significance is characterized as a personal production based on the individual apprehension of collective meanings, derived from concrete experiences" (Andrade et al., 2012, p. 203).

One of the most important studies on the topic was conducted by the Meaning of Working International Research Team (MOW) in the 1980s, involving workers from eight countries (MOW, 1987). The model proposed by these researchers encompasses three dimensions: work centrality, social norms of work, and work values.

Work centrality is defined as the importance of work in an individual's life at a given point in their personal history (Bendassoli & Borges-Andrade, 2011; MOW, 1987). Bastos, Pinho, and Costa (1995) further highlight that work centrality means the degree of importance of work in an individual's life, regardless of the reasons why it is deemed important. In the MOW research, the absolute importance of work was measured, as well as its relative importance compared to other life domains – leisure, community, religion, and family. According to the results, work ranks second in importance, after family and before leisure (Bendassoli & Borges-Andrade, 2011; MOW, 1987).

In the MOW model, social norms of work involve two types of orientations: work as an obligation and work as a right. In other words, they pertain to what people believe they should receive and what they should offer in return for working (Bendassoli & Borges-Andrade, 2011; MOW, 1987). The third dimension of the model involves work values, or more specifically, the valued outcomes of work or what a person wishes to achieve or obtain through working.

Based on this model, Kubo and Gouvêa (2012, p. 553) conducted a study with Brazilian workers and found differences from the original study's results. They concluded that "the meaning of work is reflected, in order, in work centrality, valued goals and outcomes, and lastly, social norms." Using the same sample from the previous study, Kubo, Gouvêa, and Mantovani (2013) identified a greater work centrality among women.

The model proposed by Morin (2001) has also influenced Brazilian researchers, as noted by Ferraz and Fernandes (2019). According to the author, work is deemed meaningful when it is executed efficiently and yields tangible results. Additionally, it should provide intrinsic satisfaction, be morally acceptable, foster meaningful human relationships, offer a sense of security and autonomy, and keep the worker occupied (Morin, 2001). Morin also emphasizes that these factors are essential for enhancing both the worker's quality of life and organizational efficiency.

Based on Morin's model (2001), Morin, Tonelli, and Pliopas (2007) researched young Brazilian executives and classified the meanings attributed to work into three dimensions: individual, organizational, and social. On the individual level, they include elements such as satisfaction, financial autonomy and independence, learning and growth, and personal identity. Within the organizational context, which encompasses the individual's interaction with the organization, key values include the usefulness of work, relationships, and recognition. Lastly, from a social perspective, values are reflected in the individual's contribution to society and the perception of their work as ethical and morally acceptable.

Building on the three dimensions proposed by Morin et al. (2007), Mato, Lima, Paiva, and Ferraz (2017) conducted a study examining the meanings of work from the perspective of waste collectors. The findings revealed that in the individual dimension, work is significant when is aligned with the workers' values and beliefs. Regarding the organizational dimension, work has meaning if it is valued by the company or the group and, in the social dimension, if it contribu-

tes to social development (Mato et al., 2017).

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

The present research, of qualitative and exploratory nature, was conducted with urban bus drivers from a company in the municipality of Rio de Janeiro. The company has 203 drivers, of whom only nine are women (4%). Thus, we decided to conduct the research with male drivers. Regarding age, these drivers have an average age of 46.4 years, with the youngest being 27 and the oldest, 71 years.

Given this wide age dispersion and in order to broaden the diversity of perspectives, the selection of subjects included younger drivers who started relatively early in their careers, as well as mature drivers who became drivers after having other work experiences. A total of 22 drivers participated in the study, divided into two groups of 11. The group of mature drivers aged between 45 and 63 years-old and had various other work experiences before becoming drivers. The second group of young drivers aged between 27 and 39 years-old and started in the profession relatively early in their careers.

After receiving authorization from the company's management, the drivers were invited to participate in the research. Data collection was carried out through personal interviews with the support of a semi-structured interview guide. As Brinkmann (2013, p. 3) emphasizes, interviews are "rich and indispensable source of knowledge about personal and social aspects of our lives". Throughout the interviews, we aimed to understand the life trajectory of the participants, including their social background, educational journey, and professional path. Table 1 shows the profile of the participants.

All interviews were recorded with the participants' consent and later transcribed. The data underwent content analysis, facilitated by the Atlas.ti software (Prior, 2014; Schreier, 2014). The analytical categories were developed a posteriori, grounded in a thorough reading of the transcriptions and supported by theoretical insights from the literature on the meaning of work.

Table 1

Participants' Profile

N	Age	Age when became a bus driver	Years of experience as bus driver	Highest educational level	Marital status	Number of children
Group 1 – Mature bus drivers						
E1	45	42	3	Elementary Education	Divorced	2
E2	62	53	9	Elementary Education	Married	2
E3	56	49	7	High School	Married	2
E4	58	48	10	Elementary Education	Married	3
E5	55	46	9	High School	Married	2
E6	49	44	5	Elementary Education	Separated	4
E7	49	44	5	High School	Married	4
E8	56	42	14	Elementary Education	Married	2
E9	49	44	5	High School	Married	2
E10	63	34	29	Elementary Education	Divorced	2
E11	57	49	8	Elementary Education	Married	5
Group 2 – Young bus drivers						
E12	32	27	5	Elementary Education	Married	2
E13	39	27	12	High School	Married	3
E14	38	26	12	High School	Married	2
E15	34	22	12	High School	Married	2
E16	37	26	11	High School	Married	1
E17	39	25	14	High School	Married	3
E18	36	25	11	High School	Single	2
E18	37	24	13	High School	Married	1
E20	30	24	6	High School	Married	2
E21	27	22	5	Undergraduate degree	Single	0
E22	35	23	12	High School	Single	2

Source: prepared by the authors.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The analysis and discussion of the results is organized into three sections. The first section explores the motivations behind the interviewees' choice to become bus drivers. The second section examines their work centrality, as articulated by the MOW research group (1987). Finally, the third section delves into the meanings of work for the participants, supported by the theoretical framework of the individual, organizational, and social dimensions proposed by Morin et al. (2007).

Choosing the Profession of Bus Driver

Regarding the choice to become a bus driver – a decision deemed significant for understanding the meanings of work – the analysis revealed two well-defined profiles, found among both mature and younger drivers. The first includes those who chose this profession because they enjoyed driving or, in some cases, because they dreamed of becoming bus drivers.

I've always dreamed of it; my colleagues even teased me when I said my dream was to be a bus driver: 'Come on, you're crazy.' But it's not like that at all. If you know how to work, it's not a problem; it's quite manageable. (E8)

I thought it was really cool to be a bus driver; I've always admired bus drivers. [...] I had three dreams in my life. My biggest dream was to go to the military. When I achieved that dream, I said, 'Now I need to get my driver's license!' I succeeded and then became a bus driver. (E10)

I always saw the guys passing by with buses, and I said, 'I'm going to drive one of those someday.' I kept saying, 'I'm going to learn how to drive.' I was really eager to learn how to drive a big vehicle. [...] There are times when you're tired or stressed, because that's part of it, but personally, I really enjoy driving and I have a certain ease when dealing with the public. (E12)

Since childhood, I've played... with my other brother, who is also a bus driver, and we would act like a couple of fools at home with a piece of a butter tub, pretending we were driving... It was very funny. Today, thank God, both he and I are bus drivers. (E15)

I said to myself, 'This is what I want, this is what I like.' Buses would pass by on the street and I would go crazy looking at those new buses. I knew the brand, the model, I knew everything about them. Then I said, 'When I grow up, I'm going to be a bus driver.' (E18)

Because I love driving; I really enjoy it; it's great. [...] It's really rewarding to transport people; you're carrying families, people with dreams. (E21)

Porque eu gosto de dirigir, me amarro em dirigir, é muito bom. [...] É muito legal você levar as pessoas, são pessoas que você está levando ali, famílias, gente com sonhos. (E21)

One of the participants from the mature group chose to become a bus driver – after having had various other experiences – due to the freedom of working "on the street" rather than "being stuck in an office," combined with a compensation that was considered attractive.

Because I don't like working confined. Ever since I was a salesperson, a performer, I was always out in the street, free. So I started thinking about a profession like this, where I could earn a decent salary and be at ease. (E5)

Another participant, also from the mature group, who had previously owned small businesses, decided to become a bus driver because of the more predictable work schedule and the good compensation.

Because in retail, you're confined. During Christmas, New Year, I always had to be there, because if you close the doors, you don't make money to pay the bills the next day. So, practically, I didn't see my last two children grow up; it was all about work. [...] And today I see them growing. Before, if they asked for something, I had to take it from an account I needed to pay. [...] Now I work, and the bills are there; if I said I owe anything, I would be lying; I don't owe anything. (E6)

On the other hand, there is a group that does not seem to have "chosen" this profession but arrived at it through different paths. Some were referred to it by relatives or friends, while others gained access to a job opportunity at a bus company. In other words, many participants became drivers not necessarily by choice, but because they saw an opportunity or were encouraged by people close to them who were already part of this world. In both cases, it is important to note that the "entry point" into these companies primarily occurs as fare collectors. The opportunity to work as a driver typically arises later on and represents an advancement in terms of status and compensation.

It was when a neighbor of ours, [...] a former employee of Transmil, asked me if I wanted to work as a fare collector, and I said, 'Come on, man!' 'Do you have all the documents?' 'I do.' So he brought me and referred me here. (E1)

Because a friend of mine kept telling me, 'Man, go work for the [bus company], you'll earn more; it's better.' (E9)

My uncle worked at another company from the same owner. So my uncle talked to him about me just coming out of the military and needing a job, and then he got me a position within the company group. (E19)

Partly due to the lack of jobs, right? Because I remember thinking, 'Well, I'll become a bus driver because I remember that at that time the only jobs available were as a bus driver or working in a supermarket.' (E13)

I was unemployed, passed by, and saw a job opening. (E4)

In summary, when inquired about the reasons for choosing the profession of bus driver, a clear distinction emerges between those who genuinely chose this occupation and those who became drivers because they saw an opportunity or were encouraged by someone close to them who were already involved in this field. Table 2 presents a concise overview of these findings.

Table 2

Reasons to become a bus driver

Reason	Mature bus drivers	Young bus drivers
Option		
It was a dream	E8, E10	E12, E15, E18
Pleasure in driving	E2, E3	E20, E21
Salary	-	E17
Work-life balance and salary	E6	-
Freedom and salary	E5	-
Opportunity		
Referral of friends and/or family	E9, E1	E14, E16, E19
Opportunity	E4, E7, E11	E13, E22

Source: prepared by the authors.

Work Centrality

Another aspect that emerged from the interviews is the centrality of work in these drivers' lives. Based on their accounts, we observed that family, work, and health are considered the most important aspects of their lives. For most, family comes first, followed by work.

My family, my family is everything, especially my wife, who has put up with me. I have been with her for 30 years. [...] She has suffered a lot with me because I was a drug user, and being chemically dependent is sad. (E4)
The most important, I think, is family. Family is everything. (E21)

For others, work is the priority.

The most important thing in my life right now, today, is my work, it's my work. [...] So today, the most important thing in my life is work. It wouldn't be anything else. (E1)
Can you imagine if we had nothing to do? I couldn't handle it. My body can't take it, do you understand? I've been working since I was 10 years old. Sometimes, I stay home for a day and I get restless. (E7)
I never learned to do anything else but work! (E19)

It is also important to highlight that the centrality of work largely stems from the ability to provide for their families. Considering that the participants are men, this seems consistent with the gender roles still prevalent in our society, where men see themselves as providers (Chies, 2010).

> *Work in my life? It's very important because it's from work that we bring our, our... our food home, you know? [...] First my family, then my work. And when you have a family that you need to support, you can't be without work. (E3)*

Our results corroborate the research by the MOW group (1987), whose questions measured absolute centrality – how important the person considered work in their life – and relative centrality, or the relative weight of work compared to other life spheres such as family, leisure, community, and religion. Both studies showed that work has high absolute and relative centrality, ranking second in terms of importance, following family and ahead of leisure.

Meanings of work

The analyses of the interviews revealed a clear alignment between the participants' responses and the model proposed by Morin et al. (2007). According to the authors, the meanings of work can be categorized into individual, organizational, and social factors.

In the individual dimension, we observed that work is meaningful because it provides participants with financial autonomy and allows them to support their families, as previously discussed. Many participants emphasized compensation as a positive aspect of their jobs, considering it relatively high compared to the educational level required. It is important to note that all participants come from low socioeconomic backgrounds, with many having to discontinue their studies to work and support their families.

> *With work, you survive, you support yourself, and you support the people around you, like your children, and sometimes, a wife who doesn't work. In my case, I have a little grandson now. I love taking him out for ice cream or going for a stroll at Parque de Madureira when I'm off on Sundays. So, there's no way to say that work isn't important. [...] It's your sweat; you put it in your pocket. So, for me, I take a lot of pride in that, you know? I'm very proud of it. (E2)*
>
> *Money doesn't fall from the sky. If it did, that would be great, right? But it doesn't, so you have to work; you have to get up. I don't like to stay idle because bills keep coming, and you have to pay them. So there's only one thing: pay your bills and support your family through work... Because thanks to this job, I have my family, and I lack for nothing. I have my car; it was through my work that I was able to get my car. I can buy whatever my son wants, like a video game, thanks to God and my work. That's why I have to value my work. (E14)*

Within the individual dimension, we also identified that work brings them dignity, keeps them occupied, and allows them to feel useful. These aspects are consistent with findings from previous research (Morin, 2001; Morin et al., 2007; Marra et al, 2013; Tolfo & Piccinini, 2007).

> *Work is important; work dignifies a man, because a man without work is sad, it is painful. (E4)*
>
> *Work dignifies a man's life, right? This is very important. Because without work, a man is nothing. (E15)*
>
> *I think work gives a person dignity, you know, it helps build one's name, you know, because the poor only have their name, and if they don't take care of their name, they have nothing. [...] Work is also important to help occupy a person's mind, because idleness is like the saying "idle hands are the devil's workshop", you just think nonsense. You have to do something to build, to contribute, right? (E20)*

One of the participants also emphasized the desire to excel and improve in his work, an aspect that aligns with the dimension of growth and learning identified by Morin et al. (2007).

> *I always strive to do my best and continually improve in whatever I decide to do. [...] So I have to be "the" bus driver. I have to make my profession worthwhile. (E1)*

On the other hand, several negative aspects also emerged. According to most participants, being a bus driver is physically demanding and stressful due to heavy traffic, frequent conflict situations, and a general lack of respect.

> *Because they don't respect the professional there. (E9)*
> *It's what many people say: the stress of the street, everyone on the street thinks they're better than you, thinks they're tough, you know? You are an easy target there. It doesn't matter; everyone who passes by you thinks you're wrong, wants to attack you, wants to confront you. It's a daily stress. (E22)*
> *I just don't like, sometimes, the traffic, there's a lot of rivalry with bus drivers, you know? [...] The guy won't let you merge, you have to force your way in, you know? There's animosity. Because people, I think, respect small cars more than buses. [...] Will someone insult the driver of a small car? No, they won't! Because they don't know what they might encounter there. The guy could be armed, could shoot them, you know? (E9)*

Within the organizational dimension, we observed that work provides the interviewees with opportunities to build relationships with their colleagues. Moreover, working directly with the public enables them to meet different people and form friendships. They further report that their work allows them to demonstrate their value, overcome professional challenges, and gain recognition for their contributions. These aspects are consistent with previous research on the topic (Morin, 2001; Morin et al., 2007; MOW, 1987). For instance, Morin (2001) highlights that

satisfying human relationships is a source of meaning in work.

> *You meet and make a lot of friends... There are many passengers who travel with you. Sometimes, when you're not there, they say, "Hey, you weren't here yesterday!" "No, I had a day off." We make a lot of friendships, a lot. (E10)*
> *It's good to do a good job, right? When you know how to do a good job, you'll always receive praise. The company itself will recognize that you're doing a good job. That's it! (E7)*

Also within the organizational sphere, responsibility and care for the company's "assets" seem to give meaning to the work, as described in the following account.

> *Because it's a success, right? Every time I can leave, return, and deliver the employer's assets without damage, it fills me with pride. I like that! (E1)*

On the other hand, still considering the organizational dimension, some drivers view certain aspects of their work negatively, especially when there are changes to their work schedules or when they are subjected to excessive pressure from supervisors. Other factors that make the work lose its meaning include improper deductions from their paychecks or excessive working hours. These issues also emerged in the research conducted by Battiston et al. (2006) and Oliveira and Pinheiro (2007) in Brazil, as well as in the international literature review by Tse et al. (2006).

> *I knew I had to stay at least a year there; if I left, I knew I wouldn't find a job anywhere else, so they deducted amounts from my pay for things I hadn't done. [...] Now, I've seen many colleagues receive their paycheck and cry, saying "how will I pay my rent, my wife is waiting at the market to do the shopping, how will I manage, I have nothing, an empty paycheck." [...] Because it's the worst thing, for a person to work and not get paid. (E6)*
> *The negative aspect involves [lack of] salary improvements and work hours, these*

are some points... It's exhausting. I confess that sometimes I drive while I'm half asleep. (E16)

Within the social dimension, engaging in an activity that contributes to society emerged as a key factor that conveys meaning to work.

Sometimes I look at the bus full of people and think, interesting, right? These lives are all in God's hands, but then in mine, because if I make a mistake here, I could ruin everything. So I feel very useful, I really do! (E1)
I feel fulfilled bringing workers to and from home safely. I feel accomplished because, when I look in the mirror, whether it's empty or full, I think "every person here has a family, there's a head of a family, there's a mother." So I feel fulfilled by contributing to their livelihoods and bringing them back safely to their homes, to their families. Even if they don't acknowledge me, I feel fulfilled being useful to society, helping keep Rio de Janeiro moving. (E18)

Conversely, some drivers pointed out that their work is not properly valued in Rio's society, largely due to the negative image of the city's bus companies – a reality that appears to be mirrored in other Brazilian cities (Ramalho & Resende, 2016). Some drivers express that they feel undervalued, disrespected, and constantly insecure.

We are very exposed. The media doesn't like us; generally, they don't like us. They don't like the company owner, they don't like the driver, they don't like the company employee. Whenever they get the chance, they criticize us, and because of this, sometimes people seem influenced by the media. So if the traffic is jammed, it's my fault, the boss's fault, or it is your fault that they'll be late. It's just madness. (E5)
Sometimes people complain a lot about the driver, but sometimes things aren't up to us; we're just a means, you know? We're there to do what we can do, to transport. "Oh, the bus is taking too long, I've been at the stop for half an hour, it is not coming". "Well, it's

not my fault; I'm here taking you." Sometimes people don't really know what to complain about. They insult us. (E20)
You're helping the city operate, keep moving, because without the transport sector, the city stops. It's an important sector, but unfortunately, it's undervalued, underappreciated. People say, "Oh, bus driver", but it's a profession that, if people took the time to notice, if drivers really stop, it would be chaos. (E21)

Table 3 highlights the individual, organizational, and social dimensions of the meaning of work that emerged from the interviews.

Table 3
Meaning of work dimensions

Dimension	Positive aspects	Negative aspects
Individual	Providing to family and self Confers dignity Pleasure Having an occupation Feeling useful Being good at what one does	Physical and mental strain Lack of respect
Organizational	Relationships with colleagues Recognition from the company	Long work hours Changes in work schedule Excessive supervision Unjustified deductions
Social	Contribuição para a sociedade	Lack of respect from passengers Devaluation by society Insecurity

Source: prepared by the authors.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study aimed to explore the meanings attributed to work by urban bus drivers. The research included 22 male drivers from the same company, encompassing both mature workers who entered this profession after other work experiences and younger drivers who began relatively early in this profession.

Firstly, we delved into the factors influencing the decision to become a bus driver. The results showed that some (12 participants) actively chose this occupation, particularly because they enjoyed driving or because the job offered certain advantages, such as attractive compensation for the required level of education, better work-life balance, and more freedom. On the other hand, ten participants did not seem to have made a "choice" but were either led or encouraged by relatives and friends, or saw an employment opportunity with a bus company.

The analysis also revealed that work holds high absolute centrality for all participants. Regarding relative centrality, for some, work comes first, while for others, family takes precedence. In this regard, it is important to note that work is especially significant because it allows them to provide for their families.

Regarding the dimensions that give meaning to work, it was possible to identify individual, organizational, and social aspects, in line with the model proposed by Morin et al. (2007). In the individual dimension, work is meaningful to these drivers because it allows them to support themselves and, more importantly, their families. Additionally, it is a job through which they feel useful and dignified. Some also highlight the satisfaction and enjoyment they derive from their work and the opportunity to do their job well.

Still within the individual dimension, participants pointed out the negative aspects of their work, including dealing with "difficult" passengers and the inconveniences of traffic. Despite this, there were no reports of health problems associated with "job-related stress," as identified in other research (Nascimento et al., 2015; Matos et al., 2015).

In the organizational dimension, the opportunity to connect with colleagues and to demonstrate their usefulness and gain recognition were highlighted. However, work loses its meaning when they feel excessively pressured by supervisors, face unfair payroll deductions, or deal with excessive working hours. In the social dimension, the participants noted that engaging in activities that contribute to society gives meaning to their work. On the other hand, they mentioned the lack of respect and appreciation from

Rio's society.

In summary, an important contribution of this study was highlighting that, despite being a difficult and stressful profession, the urban bus drivers who participated in the research find various meanings in their work, whether individual, organizational, or social. Notably, the ability to provide for their families, the pleasure of driving, and the sense of value in performing a socially relevant job were key aspects. Additionally, the findings suggest that the model proposed by Morin et al. (2007), originally developed through research with young executives, can be extended to include traditional professions involving workers from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

From a practical standpoint, the study pointed the need for companies to review their organizational practices, given that decisions perceived as excessive or unfair can lead to dissatisfaction and may, eventually, increase employee turnover.

As a limitation, it should be noted that one of the authors was a bus driver early in his career, which may have influenced the interpretation of the results. Furthermore, the research included drivers from a single company, whose organizational culture and specific recruitment and selection criteria may have resulted in a limited diversity of perspectives. Due to these limitations, the findings cannot be generalized. Therefore, further research in other companies and cities is recommended. Given that men and women often perceive and experience work differently, it would also be valuable to conduct studies comparing the meaning of work for male and female urban bus drivers.

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