

Challenges to Professional Performance in Organizational and Work Psychology

Desafios à Atuação Profissional em Psicologia das Organizações e do Trabalho

Desafios para la Práctica Profesional en Psicología Organizacional y del Trabajo

The term *professional performance* can be defined as a set of practices and responsibilities associated with the practice of a particular profession or specialty, in various contexts or work territories, formal and informal, based on a paid contract or the provision of voluntary services (Nixon & Murr, 2006). It involves the application of specific technical knowledge and resources, consistent with the standards and expectations of performance and results evaluated by users or beneficiaries of professional services, whether individuals or organizations.

Professional performance is influenced by a variety of factors, such as individual skills and quality of learning, experiences or personal lifepaths, opportunities for professional insertion, characteristics of the demands and service provision modality, scope of performance and responsibilities of professionals, work culture, quality of interactions, and decision-making processes. In turn, a professional field of action consists, at the same time, of a specific set of knowledge and tools to meet the demands of people/institutions and of a base of values, rules, and behaviors shared between people who work in a given área/work segment (Bastos et al., 2013), and which are supposed to be adequate to the work ethos.

The delimitation of a professional field confers some identity to the group of individuals who have acquired a certain degree of training or qualification in a certain area of knowledge, or in the practice of activities in common (Bastos & Gomide, 1989). The direction and efforts promoted by those who work professionally in Psychology of Organizations and Work (POW) is to ensure that people's needs are properly met, in the contexts in which they live or work, providing a mutual relationship of development, and improvement of knowledge, skills, and experience.

There are multiple contemporary challenges that are imposed on professional work in POW. These challenges reflect the need to improve the integration process between theories and practices, to improve research methods and instruments, to plan and implement policies and programs relevant to the development of people and to improve organizational processes (Cruz, et al., 2022).

A striking feature in the emergence and historical development of the POW was the construction of significant links between the domains of science and professional practices, characterizing a scientifically based professional field of action (Renteria, Peixoto, & Bastos, 2020). From this bond derives a significant theoretical corpus, integrated to the other sciences of work and organizations, a significant technical-instrumental collection, and a set of

practices, validated in professional practice. All these aspects serve as a strategic reference for professional work in POW, based on the needs and on the different degrees of scope of investigation and intervention in the work systems and processes.

It is important to consider that professional work in POW begins or should begin in the training activities of the undergraduate course in Psychology and related sciences, enabling students to apply the knowledge and methods acquired in the teaching-learning process, including guidance activities and direct and indirect supervision of field work. This is perhaps the first challenge in preparing students for professional life - favoring the transition from university to work, through the development of significant and anticipatory skills and competencies for the full exercise of the profession and its specialties. Internships and extension activities aimed at the world of work and organizations represent opportunities for closer ties and mutual learning between universities and organizations, mediated by the work and guidance of students and professors, as well as by the conditions and characteristics of the labor market.

Especially over the last two decades, technological innovations have promoted important changes in the provision of services in various professions, including POW, providing benefits and opportunities in the process of interaction between people, but also new technical requirements and challenges in meeting professional demands. The intensification in the use of the internet and of increasingly modern technological devices has influenced the way people communicate, determining the speed at which things happen and causing changes in opportunities in the job market.

Technological advances have enabled the generation of new learning and skills, improving the effectiveness and efficiency of different areas and work activities. In this direction, it is important for POW professionals to contribute to the process of socioeconomic inclusion, offering solutions to problems that affect people's work and lives, regardless of their differences or disadvantages, helping users, workers, organizations and the State. In this regard, it is important to consider ethical, environmental and psychosocial parameters, in order to ensure values, organizational conditions, and cultural belonging, respectively, aimed at equity and the real possibility of work for people with functional differences (Raimi, Tariq, & Kah, 2022). These parameters can serve as a reference for overcoming architectural, communicational, and instrumental barriers that limit access to services, environments,

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and professional opportunities, as well as the use of assistive technologies and other resources that favor human development in the world of work (Silva & Carvalho-Freitas, 2021).

It is also important to pay attention to the demographic transition and to the relationship between the aging of the active population and work, a process that occurs in different countries that are undergoing significant changes in their age distribution, with an increase in the number of elderly people compared to younger people. There are implications that must be considered: adaptation to new technologies, new work designs, health and psychological integrity, job opportunities, and career development among older workers (Finkelstein & Truxillo, 2021).

POW professionals can also help organizations prepare for crises and emergencies, carrying out risk assessments and monitoring, and mobilizing systems to protect people's health and psychological integrity. The legacy of the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted challenges and opportunities for those who work in the field of POW, both in the field of theoretical and instrumental contributions and in the operational capacity to develop training plans to face crises and emergencies, in view of the scenario of changes and restrictions experienced (Cruz et al., 2021). The mobilizations of POW professionals were intense, in different work contexts, in order to help workers and organizations to deal with the difficulties during and after the COVID-19 pandemic (Felipe, Medeiros, Camargo, & Goulart Júnior, 2021; Peixoto, Vasconcelos, & Bentivi, 2020).

The production and dissemination of knowledge through research activities and scientific publications have played a decisive role in achieving an academic and professional status in the field of POW. In this sense, it is also challenging the need to maintain continuing education processes (stricto sensu and lato sensu) that involve technical-scientific updating, critical reflection - based on data and evidence - and the development of skills and competences to promote qualified professional interventions. Just as it is important to emphasize the necessary feedback between researching, systematizing, and building knowledge on the one hand; and applying knowledge, analyzing its impacts, changes, advances and setbacks in professional practices, on the other. Facing challenges in professional practice is an inherent condition of professions and their specialties, a kind of *perpetuum mobile* - the energy generated by professional activity feeds back the very need for professional activity in society. In POW, it's no different. Organizations learn from the experiences of other organizations and themselves, just as professionals learn from the knowledge and practices of other professionals and from their own experience and development. It is an intergenerational, systemic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal learning, supported by the need to respond to demands, sometimes broader (policies, processes, programs, relations with society) or specific (centered on the individual, his activity and immediate environment).

In this sense, the possibilities of dealing, more broadly or specifically, with socioeconomic crises, conflicts at work, ethical dilemmas, change and adaptive processes, changes in psychological contracts between individuals and organizations, planning and implementation of policies and programs of work and people management, life transitions, careers and professional experiences, and personal, professional, and organizational maturation cycles (Peixoto et al., 2020).

Facing challenges also implies thinking about challenging scenarios. Learn from the past, recognize the needs of the present and anticipate needs, problems, and opportunities in the future. Let ourselves, therefore, think about the following question: What will be the scenario of professional performance in POW in the next 10 or 20 years?

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