

Improving Job Satisfaction by Re-assessing the Discourses of Workers,  
Leaders, and Work Culture:

A Critical Approach.

by

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## **Abstract**

As modern organizations strive to take competitive advantage in ever increasing globalized markets, job satisfaction has recently become a major theme of discussion in HRM and organizational studies. An ever-expanding global market is placing increasing demands on organizations, and as employees are an organization's greatest asset, job satisfaction has emerged as one of the primary means through which organizations attempt to gain a competitive edge. However, not all cultures have equally adapted to the HRM's new approach. Portugal, with the lowest work satisfaction in Europe (Eurostat, 2022) and one of the lowest productivity rates (OECD, 2019) seems to have failed so far to follow the repositioning process that shifted work relationships from direct, often coercive forms of power and control to forms based in consensus with the employees' sense of self and identity in mind. Portugal is at the same time renowned for its poor management (Lopes, 2010) and seems to exemplify a culture that has much to gain from this repositioning of workers wellbeing to the center of organization's priorities. There are some facets of this phenomenon of job satisfaction that remain uninvestigated. One of those facets has to do with the constitutive role of communication in the creation of organizational reality, and another one is the underlying influence that power relations have on the maintenance of old mechanistic approaches to HRM. The purpose of this study is thus to explore the discourses that constitute an organizational culture that breeds low job satisfaction with a critical stance that can provide understandings of these neglected perspectives in the literature. This study thus aims to understand what are the meanings and practices within this culture that can explain such a dire organizational reality by deconstructing the discourses around work. I carried out semi-structured interviews with influential local leaders and critically analyzed them in the search for the discursive practices that continuously (re)created unsatisfied workers. I embraced a socio-constructivist, interpretative approach to organizational reality and developed a Foucauldian inspired Critical Discourse Analysis

that could bring to light the discursive formations that allow for this phenomenon to persist. This qualitative analysis revealed a number of discourses that are likely to play a major role in the maintenance of a work environment that is not conducive to job satisfaction. These are discourses about workers, leaders, work culture, and job satisfaction itself. This conclusion is supported by Foucault's understanding that contingent meanings enabled by institutionalized ways of doing informs people on how to perceive themselves and other in certain ways, and this limits other possibilities to be considered (Foucault, 2002). Furthermore, the analysis uncovered that the authoritarian leadership approach typical in most Portuguese organizations is a main contributing factor in the perpetuation of low job satisfaction. The findings indicate that changing these discourses will help in the creation of more satisfying workplaces, and that organizations must embrace more participatory approaches to leadership, as the autocratic styles of leadership seem to be at the basis of the low job satisfaction lived in the country. The findings of this study are of interest to HR practitioners, management, policy makers and organizations in general. Further research examining the discourses that employees portray around job satisfaction would be a great addition to the findings discussed in this study.

**Key words:** job satisfaction, worker wellbeing, leadership, participatory management, work culture, meanings of work, organizational discourse, CCO, Foucault, CDA, power, communication, authoritarian leadership.

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## **1. Introduction**

Due to increasing pressures of an increasingly globalized economy, and as a result of the continuous changes in the labor market, organizations and businesses now compete more fiercely than ever before, uncovering the significance of many aspects of work (Belias & Koustelios, 2014). The rising competition and interdependencies have resulted on an ever-greater burden on those of working age in the delivery of products and services (Baptiste, 2008). Rapid environmental and technological development demand more from businesses than ever and forced organizations to focus on their employees in order to endure (Shahab & Nisa, 2014). As organizations needed to adapt to this competitive global environment in which we all live, work and operate, a new approach to HR management brought an emphasis to the health and productivity of its workforce. As a result, job satisfaction has gained traction as a theme in the modern discourse of labor and became one of the most studied aspects of human resources management and organization studies in general (Baptiste, 2008). Following on this premise, cutting edge organizations have been increasingly paying attention to essential factors for employee wellbeing and have reaped benefits from the competitive advantage that job satisfaction brought to the organization.

Job satisfaction is the encompassing term used in this paper that incorporates employee wellbeing and satisfaction at work. These factors are important for organizations as satisfied employees display lower levels of absenteeism, tardiness, show higher levels of commitment and motivation that leads them to produce more and better, while it keeps them in the organization, saving it the great costs of staff turnover (Santosh & Sharma, 2021). Job satisfaction impacts not only organizations, but society as a whole, because employees are not only members of the organizations they work in, but they are also the citizens that make the societies we live in.

Portugal is an interesting case to study due to its sustained downward trend in the evolution of job satisfaction in the last decades. A number of factors have culminated in the lowest job satisfaction in Europe, coupled with one of the lowest productivity levels in the economic region (OECD, 2019). According to EuroStat (2022), Portugal's highest indicator of job satisfaction is lower than the lowest indicator of the next European country in the list. According to the OECD (2019), Portugal has been living in a context of profound social transformations, characterized by inequality, social exclusion and an aging population. Given Portugal's current productivity deficit compared to other OECD nations, stagnating productivity is especially concerning to the country's economy (National Productivity Board, 2019). Given how both factors are linked (Zarim et al., 2016), the country would benefit from a focus on the enhancement of job satisfaction to the improvement of its productivity. In parallel, authors have written about how the country's work culture is still hostage of its history of institutionalized oppression and societal stratification that might be impeding the creation of satisfying organizational environments (Lopes, 2010). This study will thus explore this phenomenon of low job satisfaction, in an attempt to understand what contributes to it, and how this problem could be alleviated.

Departing from a socio-constructivist view, in this interpretative study, I take on the constitutive role of communication in organizations approach (CCO). Coming from the premise that organization is built on communication, I will review discourses that not only reflect but also (re)create the Portuguese work culture and this reality of low job satisfaction. Like any other organizational factor, employee wellbeing is reflected and constituted in language usage, therefore, to study how job satisfaction is constituted, it made sense to interview people within the culture to extract these discourses, in an attempt to deconstruct them and better understand the problem. The interviewees of this study not only contain the discourses in them, like everyone, but, due to their position and experience, their greater agency in the discourses that permeate the culture (Foucault,



1980), will potentially provide a deeper understanding of the discourses that perpetuate the organizational reality that the country finds itself in.

Moreover, this paper will delve into the understanding of the role of power in the matters of the organization. Considering that issues of power are ubiquitous concerns that have shaped the fields of organizational communication and management studies and are, arguably, at the center of every social scientist's endeavor (Mumby, 2015), the role of power in organizational matters has been widely neglected in the study of HRM and organization studies, as well as in CCO studies (Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, 2011). This study thus aims to bring to surface the ubiquity of the power factor in organizational matters. If the organizational reality is constituted in communication via power relations, to understand how low worker satisfaction is being perpetuated we need to explore the power dynamics enacted in the everyday ways people talk about workers and the workplace. Thus, this study aims to contribute with this approach which has been neglected (Putnam & Nicotera, 2010), by critically assessing the power dynamics that lie underneath organizational realities, and so gain insights on what might be causing the low job satisfaction levels that the country displays through a dissection of the discourses that constitute the Portuguese organizational culture.

Furthermore, as explained in Foucault's work (1972 ,1980), even though everyone plays a role in the meaning-making and in the negotiation of power that creates knowledge, the (privileged) group who has access to more resources will be able to exert more influence in the production of discourses that favor their interest. They will have a greater agency in this co-production and in the negotiation of what constitutes knowledge (reality). Therefore, to get a better grasp of the discourses that (re)create this reality, I looked for the most influential leaders I could find, with a vast understanding of Portuguese work culture and with great influence in their professional circles and invited them for an interview where they would talk about the Portuguese work culture. Due to

the nature of what I proposed to explore, it was Critical Discourse Analysis with its systematic, multidisciplinary approach, the tool that would allow me to deconstruct the local work culture into a deeper understanding of the problem at hand.

The aim of this study is thus to dissect the discursive organizational reality of a country with record levels of low job satisfaction by looking at the discourses of a culture with low job satisfaction. This paper covers both the communication and intercultural dimension of the organizational problems that come with globalization processes, covering the main themes of this MA in Culture, Communication and Globalization. The research question that guides this paper is ‘what are the discourses that leaders articulate around Portuguese work culture and how do these discourses relate to low job satisfaction’? To do that, I embarked in semi-structured interviews to local leaders with vast practical experience in Portuguese organizational culture. These interviews were then recorded, and its transcription composes the data corpus of this study. To analyze the data, I took on a Foucauldian inspired critical discourse analysis (CDA). In this analysis, I “identify the knowledges contained in discourse, and critically analyze how these knowledges are connected to power relations in power-knowledge complexes” (Jäger & Maier, 2009, p. 110), to create understandings of how this low job satisfaction phenomenon comes to being. Through this analysis, I will unveil the discourses that continuously (re)produce this reality of low job satisfaction.

This study is important for organizations within and outside this culture, because if we gain insights into this discursive reality, it will make evident how culture, embedded in communication through power relations, has implications in job satisfaction, and this will bring about new understandings that organizations can employ to make the most of their teams. This paper will be significant for researchers, and practitioners who delve into questions of leadership, particularly those who acknowledge the constitutive role of communication and the pivotal role power represents in organizational matters (Akhtar & Nazarudin, 2020). This study will uncover

underlying causes hidden in Discourse that can explain how power plays a role in (discursive) practices that are shaping organizations and institutions in the long run. Knowing the importance leadership plays in the organization, namely in the maintenance of an organizational culture that sustains satisfied employees, it becomes imperative to understand how leadership (discursive) practices can explain Portugal's exquisite low rates of job satisfaction. The findings of this study of job satisfaction and leadership are potentially transversal to other work cultures in similar situations.

This paper is structured in the following way: in the next section I will ground the study in relevant literature; then I will present and explain the theoretical lenses that guide my research and from which I approach the problem; in the subsequent section, I will describe the methodology employed; afterwards, I will present the detailed critical discourse analysis where I show the participants' utterances around the issue, and where I interpret and relate them with job satisfaction; then, in the discussion section I will explore the paper's contributions to the literature and answer the research question. Finally, in the conclusion section, I summarize the study, discuss its implications and make recommendations for future research.

## **2. Literature Review**

Much scholarship has been done on job satisfaction and leadership. In this section, I will ground the study in the relevant literature around this topic of job satisfaction, starting by introducing some context and concepts. This topic of study falls within the field of Human Resources Management (HRM). Thus, in the first part of this section I will be covering HRM's developments in the past decades; in the second part of this section, I will give a detailed review of the literature on leadership, organizational culture, and job satisfaction.

## 2.1. *Developments of HRM*

Although there are many definitions of HRM in the literature (Daniels, 2006; Huselid, 1995), for the purposes of this discussion, I will be referring to Purcell and colleagues' (2003) characterization of HRM: a set of practices used to manage a company's workforce into contributing to the organizations' objectives and goals, including hiring and selection, training and development, worker involvement, pay and rewards, flexibility, participation in decision-making, communications, and employee welfare. To talk about HRM's recent developments, it is relevant to briefly introduce one of HRM's leading approaches for many decades, Taylorism (Mumby & Stohl, 1991). Taylor's principles were commonly viewed as an efficiency theory, the "one best way," as he famously put it, but according to newer approaches are more appropriately described as an attempt to split up the labor process, where managers were given a monopoly over knowledge of work and were placing employees in the position of carrying out management's vision of the job (Mumby, 1988). Dennis Mumby (2015) makes the point that the whole development of management theory, from Frederick Taylor's scientific management to the present, can be considered a series of progressively complex attempts to extract surplus value from alienated labor.

These mechanistic attempts to increase worker's output have not come without setback in the past. This approach to workers' productivity has had a negative effect on the health and wellbeing of the workforce and resulted in high costs to society. According to the American Health and Safety Executive (2006), stress caused illnesses costed businesses \$3.8 billion annually in the U.S.A. alone. This development led to concerns about the high cost of employees' absence to businesses and society (MacDonald, 2005). As a result, while early management theory and practice relied on the forceful control of (alienated) employees at the point of production, in the last few decades we have seen the emergence of consent-based processes, in which the "soul" or identity of the worker is increasingly at the center of managerial control. While in the early stages of

capitalism HRM involved exploitative attempts to intensify the labor process through long hours, unfavorable working conditions, and harsh management techniques, in the 20th century we saw an increase in attempts to frame the capital-labor relationship as a cooperative one in which management techniques sought to maximize the potential of both workers and managers for the good of all (Sennet, 2006).

This increasing interest in wellbeing at work has emerged against the backdrop of the general ill health of employees that resulted from physical, psychosocial, and personal factors, which led academics, managers and organizations worldwide to concern themselves with wellbeing at work, and subsequently we saw a change in the Discourse towards an acknowledgement of the necessity of workers' wellbeing. Within this new approach, managers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century endeavored to create a dedicated and qualified staff in an environment of trust and camaraderie (Gould-Williams, 2004). This method differs from the traditional viewpoint, which held that workers should be exploited objectively and logically like any other capital resource (Legge, 1995) and workplace wellbeing increasingly obtained recognition as an important factor in determining organizational success (Peccei, 2004; Tehrani et al., 2007; Warr, 2002). Tehrani and colleagues (2007) noted that workplace wellness is progressively moving up the business priority as more organizations become aware of the advantages and contributions that come with the implementation of workplace health and wellness policies. This new approach led to an understanding of work as a place where individuals developed their identities and where communication played a major role.

This new approach that repositioned the worker at the center of organizational priorities emerged simultaneously with an understanding that work has deep implications in the formation of workers' identity, and that involved a greater investment in organizational communication. In modern capitalism, communication is understood as having a significant position in the creation and transmission of value at least in two major ways. First, the crucial cycle of production and

consumption in which capitalism relies is dependent on advanced communication practices; secondly, it serves as a fundamental building block for the development of professional identities at work. Through communicative performance, people create and maintain (unstable) identities. At the same time, corporations discursively create company branding, workplace cultures, and performance metrics that employees must navigate (Mumby, 2015). In view of this, post-Fordist businesses seem to have fully accepted the constitutive role of communication in establishing organizational realities, an example of that being the growth of branding's significance over the past couple of decades and its link to corporate value (Arvidsson, 2006).

In conclusion, the past century has witnessed the formation of several managerial discourses that have repositioned the employee in relation to the labor process in response to health and production crises. This process of repositioning has moved from direct, frequently coercive forms of power and control to forms anchored in consensus targeted at the employee's sense of self and identity and is best understood in terms of the linkages among communication, power, and organization (Casey, 1995; Kunda, 1992; Willmott, 1993). The focus of management has changed from external forms of control (direct surveillance, technology, bureaucratic norms, etc.), to internal ones (ideology, meaning systems, constructions of self, etc.) (Mumby, 2015). In sum, employee wellbeing is progressively moving up in HRM's hierarchy of priorities as organizations become aware of the advantages that its implementation can bring. Moreover, the constitutive role of communication in the organization is increasingly becoming essential to the development of these mechanisms, particularly in the context of neoliberal, post-Fordist labor arrangements.

## 2.2. *Understanding job satisfaction*

Chang and Lee (2007) investigated the connection and interaction between leadership style, organizational culture, and job satisfaction. According to their results, leadership style and

organizational culture were highly likely to influence job satisfaction positively. Let us look into these concepts separately.

### *2.2.1. Defining job satisfaction*

Job satisfaction was a neglected area of inquiry within the field of HRM (Baptiste, 2008), that started to get traction in the past few decades as the understanding of the importance of employee wellness grew (Currie, 2001; Department for Work and Pensions, 2006; Kersley et al., 2006; MacDonald, 2005; Peccei, 2004; Tehrani et al., 2007; Warr, 2002). The literature covers various terms that are sometimes used interchangeably, such as “workplace wellbeing/wellness”, “happiness at work”, “work/job satisfaction”, and others. Different authors approach the terms with different lenses that I will summarize in the next paragraph. However, in the interest of this study, I will be employing the term ‘job satisfaction’, as it seems to encompass the various facets by which we can look at this indicator.

According to Peccei (2004), workplace wellness refers to employees' general feeling of enjoyment as well as their physical and mental health (Currie, 2001). According to Warr (2002), job-related wellbeing relates to a person's contentment with their employment in terms of factors including compensation, coworkers, supervisors, working conditions, job security, training opportunities, engagement, teamwork, and the type of work they do. Jernigan and colleagues (2002) describe job satisfaction as a person's feeling of satisfaction with both their job and the wider organizational framework in which it takes place. According to Locke and Latham (1990), work satisfaction is more specifically described as a pleasant or good emotional state brought on by an evaluation of one's employment or professional experiences. Similarly, according to Fisher and colleagues (2004), job satisfaction encompasses the good sentiments connected to the fulfilling components of a job that naturally result in increased work performance. Currie (2001) adds that

workers' level of satisfaction is correlated with an individual's level of contentment with their employment's terms and circumstances as well as the elements that make up their physical working environment.

### *2.2.2. Relevance of job satisfaction*

Job satisfaction is increasingly being recognized as an important factor in determining organizational success and innovative businesses that have made significant investments in the welfare of their workforce are now reaping the rewards (Peccei, 2004; Tehrani et al., 2007; Warr, 2002). Furthermore, according to Armstrong and Baron's work (2005), it is now widely acknowledged that people, along with their combined skills, abilities, knowledge, and experience, and their willingness to use these for the benefit of the organization that employs them, significantly contribute to organizational success and serve as a significant source of competitive advantage. McDonald (2005) concluded how health and wellbeing of workers result in great costs to business and the public purse, and that "worker discontent" has been considered to be one of the main reasons for decline in productivity. In 2006, the U.S.A. Department for Work and Pensions declared that healthy employees are essential to keep an organization efficient and profitable (Department for Work and Pensions, 2006). Issues such as absenteeism and accidental injuries led corporations to take on a broader perspective of what a healthier, happier, and more productive workforce can accomplish in terms of improved performance and productivity (Department for Work and Pensions, 2005; Economic and Social Research Council, 2006).

Cooper and Robertson (2001) conclude that performance at work is positively impacted by employee well-being and emphasize that the benefits of having a healthy workforce are highlighted by the link between job satisfaction and heightened performance. In addition, because workers are more satisfied with their jobs, they are less likely to leave, which leads to higher efficiency since



costs and ineffectiveness associated with staff turnover such as recruiting, and training are reduced (Unger, 2011). Furthermore, secure jobs save society from the burdens of unemployment and have a positive spill-over economic effect in the local community, because workers with good jobs will preserve a healthy economy (Musterd & Ostendorf, 2013). According to Legge (1995), committed workers have a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values, they demonstrate a willingness to put forth a significant amount of effort on its behalf, and have a strong desire to keep their affiliation with the organization.

### 2.2.3. *Organizational culture and leadership*

The concept of organizational culture was first introduced with the Hawthorne studies (Mayo, 1933; Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1939) where its authors investigated work group culture. More recently, organizational culture has been given various definitions through the decades. It has been defined by Lytle and colleagues (1995) as a complex web of norms, values, assumptions, attitudes, and beliefs that are exclusive to a given group and are reinforced and maintained through socialization, training, incentives, and restrictions. Organizational culture has also been famously defined by Schein (2011) as shared philosophies, ideologies, beliefs, feelings, assumptions, expectations, attitudes, norms, and values of the organization. Organizational culture may be referred to as "the software of the mind," as Hofstede put it (1991, p. 3), description that emphasizes the crucial impact that organizational culture has in how workers think and act (Belias & Koustelios 2014). Theorists of organizations explained that, like people, companies had personalities., organizations may be flexible or inflexible, pleasant or hostile, innovative or traditional, and this will determine how its members function within it (Lunenburg, 2011).

Besides organizational culture, another element that significantly impacts the performance of human resources within an organization is leadership (Shahab & Nisa 2014). Leadership is a

crucial concept in organizational sciences, and over the years has inspired many empirical investigations (Belias & Koustelios 2014). Schein (1992) writes that corporate culture and the leader have an intrinsic connection. According to Bryman (1992), leadership is the capacity to lead people toward common objectives. According to Sutrisno (2010), leadership is the practice of inspiring people to act in the pursuit of certain results and organizational objectives. According to Voon et al. (2011), leadership is a process of interaction among leaders and workers in which a leader strives to positively impact the behavior of employees to achieve corporate goals. According to Hasibuan (2011), leadership refers to a person's ability to shape a group of people's actions in a way that advances the goals of the organization. Akhtar and Nazarudin (2020) state that the primary roles of leadership are introducing change and motivation. Yukl and Van Fleet (1992) emphasize the significance of leadership in the framework of an organization because it is through successful leadership that desirable outcomes can be achieved, at the individual and organizational levels.

#### *2.2.4. Precursors to job satisfaction*

Job satisfaction has been connected to certain organizational practices and multiple studies conclude that job satisfaction and commitment are undoubtedly influenced by both organizational and national culture (Koustelios, 1991). Likewise, in recent years, empirical studies have made us aware that leadership has a positive and significant influence on job satisfaction (Shahab & Nisa 2014). According to Akhtar and Nazarudin (2020), leadership is seen to have a significant impact in firms and does determine whether employees have high levels of job satisfaction and trust. Rifki (2012) also found a strong and positive association between leadership style and work satisfaction. In the same manner, authors have concluded that work satisfaction will be lower when leadership is poorer (Shahab & Nisa 2014). Purkanto (2011) and Soegihartono (2012) successfully demonstrate how leadership affects HR performance in a substantial way, while authors have argued that most

employees are reasonable and are eager to perform in a way that makes them feel good about their performance, and when the opposite is observed in an employee, it is either an atypical case or, most commonly, because management has somehow damaged that employee's intrinsic motivation (Sirota & Klein, 2013). Ogbonna and Harris (2000) found that leadership is in fact linked to performance and is an important contributor and indicator of job satisfaction.

The work of Lewin, Lippit and White (1939) was pioneer in this field, they produced an acclaimed study where they identified different leadership styles. Although later research identified many other specific leadership styles, those early studies turned out to be highly influential and remain relevant (Belias & Koustelios, 2014). In this study, they established two major leadership styles: authoritarian leadership (autocratic): in which an autocratic leader is likely to provide clear expectations for what needs to be done, when it should be done, and how it should be done, and where there is also a clear division between the leader and the followers. Autocratic leaders make decisions independently with little or no input from the rest of the group. According to their study, authoritarian leadership is best applied to situations where there is little time for group decision-making or where the leader is the most knowledgeable member of the group. Abuse of this style is usually viewed as controlling, bossy, and dictatorial; and participative leadership (democratic) style which has been found to be the most effective in the frame of Lewin and colleagues' studies. A democratic leader usually offers guidance to group members and is likely to participate in the group and allow input from other group members. Participative leaders encourage group members to participate, but retain the final say over the decision-making process, this creates group engagement and increases motivation and creativity in the teams (Belias & Koustelios, 2014).

In conclusion, in the past few decades, we have witnessed the formation of several managerial discourses that have repositioned the employee in relation to the labor process in response to crises, which resulted in a change in the approach to HRM and its importance for the

organization. In contrast to the old HRM approach of the past, we have witnessed a change in HRM's towards an approach centered on employees, and an emergence of a concern with job satisfaction. We have also discovered how culture and leadership are intricately connected to job satisfaction. If job satisfaction is important and if leadership is important and sustains culture, which are both precursors to job satisfaction (Chang & Lee, 2007); and if participatory approaches are more effective, promote engagement/motivation and create cultures that make for more satisfying workplaces; then, the literature points to the necessity of leaders embracing a participatory leadership approach to create cultures that make for more satisfying workplaces.

Furthermore, despite the plethora of literature covering the pervasive role of power relations in organizational issues, studies in this field are rarely addressed as issues of power (Putnam & Nicotera, 2010). Therefore, this study of job satisfaction requests a focus on how leaders talk in the workplace about the culture with a critical view that allows for the uncovering of power dynamics that are an ubiquitous reality for organizations and are so often ignored. The aim of this study is thus to critically explore the problem of low job satisfaction in relation to leadership and culture, with an attention to power dynamics, to bring insights, to critique the meanings about work, and to shed light on how discourses relate to and (re)produce organizational realities. Accordingly, the guiding question of this study is: 'what are the discourses that leaders articulate around Portuguese work culture and how do these discourses relate to low job satisfaction'? In the following section, I will be giving a detailed overview of the theoretical lenses that guide this study.

### **3. Theory**

This section has three subsections: CCO, Power and Communication, and Foucault being that the main guiding theory for this paper is Foucault's theory of discourse and power, but which I

will be reviewing lastly. As an introductory note, Foucault theorizes that power generates knowledge, and that discourse and knowledge have consequences on power and ‘truth’. Discourses are systemic and are the most important way to exert power, it is through discourse that a disciplined modern society is enabled and governed (Rose & Miller, 2008). Discourses reflect and enable ways of knowing that benefit certain interests in detriment of others, being that the most powerful ones will control the discourses that favor their interests (Foucault, 1980).

The way I introduce Foucault’s theory in relation to organization studies is through the notion of Communication as Constitutive of Organization (CCO). CCO brings a focus on communication in organizational practice and is concerned with how organizations and organizing phenomena are created in language use. Additionally, I will be covering general theories of power and communication: the discourses that constitute the organization have a dimension of power, and discourse is not solely a vehicle for achieving organizational goals (Watson, 1995), but also enforces the legitimation of particular perspectives and strengthens status relationships that influence who decides what (Oswick et al., 2004; Cornelissen et al., 2008).

### 3.1. *Communication as Constitutive of Organization*

*“CCO scholarship presents communication as the main force that creates, generates, and sustains—constitutes—what we consider to be organization and organizing practices. It holds that imagining organization as communication—where communication is not merely a participant in organization but, much more radically, is equivalent to organization—is both an ontological move with novel heuristic benefits and can serve as a grounding for methodological claims”.*

(Schoeneborn et al., 2017:1).

Along with a newly developed focus on (organizational) power is the notion that the discursive elements of organizations constitute their reality. The "CCO argument," is clarified in many frameworks (Smith, 1993; McPhee & Zaug, 2000; Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004). In contrast to communication as a transmission model<sup>1</sup>, a constitutive model proceeds upon the claim that communication does not merely express, but also creates social realities (Searle 1995). Researchers have sought to demonstrate how speech acts intrinsically to construct organizational reality in a certain way by characterizing organizations as made up of diverse "texts" (Frost, 1985; Mumby, 1987; Rosen, 1985). The model of Communicative Constitution of Organization (CCO) originated in the 1980s with a linguistic approach to organizational communication. This theory advanced that organizations are not static but intrinsically part of a dynamic process of communicating (Blaschke, 2009). The phrase "Communicative Constitution of Organization" is concerned with how people come to see themselves as identified with the organization or become agents of the organization by how they communicate; and how people's (discursive) practices, or messages, become an organization. In a working environment, communication creates meanings of work, these meanings of work scale-up to be meanings of organization, and that is how the term CCO emerges. CCO identifies language as a basic ontological condition, in that it is actively involved in the production of social realities and not merely in reflecting on them (Rorty, 1967).

Communication studies as an academic discipline are concerned with diverse conceptions of communication as a social practice and develops (communicational) explanations that are useful alternatives to other sorts of disciplinary (psychological, sociological) accounts (Craig 1999; Deetz, 2012). In this sense, communication is a dimension of social interaction and practice, specifically

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<sup>1</sup> The communicative transmission model sees communication as a linear transmission process, as a conduit or a medium for messages being passed back and forward in a cycle of message production, dissemination, and reception (Ashcraft, Kuhn. Cooren). In a transmission model, the primary question is thus one of effectiveness.

the dimension in which meaning is arranged during practice; communication draws on and reproduces the signification resources of a social system in practical terms (Deetz, 1994). As suggested by Heritage (1984), realities are communicated into existence, thus a conversation does not merely represent manager and employees' internal states, but it is rather a co-creation of meanings of 'what is' and consequently controls and coordinates organizational activity.

In this study of job satisfaction, it was imperative to see how people are communicating their organizational realities into existence and CCO becomes a useful perspective in the analysis of institutionalized discourses that permeate organizational culture. CCO proposes that the ways we communicate at work not only create the organization but also our sense of self/identity at work (Axley, 1984). For CCO proponents, communication is a central organizing process that oversees the intersection between the symbolic and material worlds. In line with this model, this paper centers itself around the broader problem of how the realities of organizational life are constituted through communication. I depart from the premise that the discourses revolving around work constitute and are actively (re)producing the meaning of organizational life. Therefore analyzing these discourses around work can provide insights into the meanings of organizational culture that lead to job satisfaction. If communication constitutes organizations, the focus on power becomes interesting as to what meanings become important, and who do these meanings benefit. In the next sub section I will review predominant theories of power in communication.

### *3.2. Power in communication*

The interest in questions of power and discourse in organizations emerged from recent critical breakthroughs in organization studies (Mumby, 2015). The discourses which constitute organizations have a dimension of power, being that power is not intrinsic, nor does it have an institutionalized owner, it is negotiated by the parties during communication. As Cooren (2004)

explains, organizational actors' discourses have an impact on how power is distributed and how control is exercised. Discourse is a vehicle for achieving certain organizational goals in organizational sense-making processes (Watson, 1995), such as legitimizing particular perspectives and reinforcing status relations (Oswick et al., 2004; Cornelissen et al., 2008). Power is inescapable, as Arnold Tannenbaum (1968) argues: organization implies control. Control procedures aid in limiting eccentric behavior and maintain it in line with the organization's logical strategy (Mumby, 2015).

A solid grasp of power can only be achieved via a clear understanding of how communication builds organizations (Ashcraft et al., 2009). According to this notion, the communication structure of an organization serves as a prelude to the use of power. Nothing can be done without meaning (communication), not even power or hierarchy can be exercised. This notion serves to illustrate how communication is a precursor to the exercise of power. In other words, events like resource distribution, conflict, hierarchy, etc., only make sense within a certain field of meaning that communicates the significance of such occurrences (Alvesson & Karreman, 2011). In fact, communication not only makes organizational power possible, but also enables it.

Power has become a key term in understanding how certain organizational and institutional systems succeed over others under the umbrella of a critical paradigm (Clegg, 1975, 1989; Foucault, 1979, 1980; Mumby, 1988). From a critical standpoint, the idea of power has been revived and reframed to investigate how dominance relations are created and maintained inside organizations (Clegg, 1975; Conrad, 1983; Giddens, 1979, 1984; Mumby, 1988). According to these studies, power is a 'deep structure' phenomenon that shapes how organization members form their sense of identity and structures disparate interests into a cohesive whole that upholds specific relationships of autonomy and dependency. Power is thus a ubiquitous aspect of organizational life that shapes the identities of organization members. Discourse develops meaning constructions



founded in a system of presence and absence that consistently prioritizes and marginalizes various organizational experiences as an organized social practice (Mumby, 1988). In other words, the relationship between various groups is never predetermined or set in stone but is instead constantly negotiated through opposing meaning forms (Hall et al., 1977). And these relationships are not only ideational but grounded materially in everyday practice. Power is how social relations articulate around meaning systems.

Discourse and power have a complicated connection that influences the formation of identities (Hardy & Phillips, 2004; Kuhn, 2008). The idea that speech creates subjects is one with especially solid underpinnings (Jäger & Meier, 2009). To put it in other words, a person's perception of who they are comes from their imbrication in networks of historically contingent meanings conveyed by institutionalized patterns of doing, thinking, and speaking as we are taught (told) to perceive ourselves in certain ways (Tenorio, 2011). According to Taylor (2009), every act of communication presupposes the development of authority relationships. In this way, ideologies “cement and unite” opposing interest groupings (Gramsci, 1971, p. 328). Consequently, a certain hegemonic social formation is defined through a variety of discursive activities that serve as ideological ‘fixes’ for meaning. The construction of a person's subjectivity, or identity, occurs because of their participation in social and communication acts. This logic illustrates how ideology is literally rooted in daily discursive processes rather than being only ideational (i.e., embodied in personal thoughts and beliefs). Therefore, from this viewpoint, power is thus the process by which consensual social connections are defined within the framework of particular meaning systems, rather than as simple coercion (Mumby, 1988).

As seen in the previous section, the ‘contested terrain’ of management of workplace dynamics has shifted from a mechanistic approach to workers, to a focus on the employees' sense of self and identity, and this relates to power in discourse as we might claim that power is not just

interdicted or restricting, but playing a generative role in the formation of social reality. Understanding how communication becomes a crucial component in the creation and replication of value in capitalism is necessary for this realization. At least two arguments make this the case. First, communication serves as a fundamental building block for the development of professional identities at work. Through communicative performance, people create and maintain (unstable) identities; in turn, corporations discursively create workplace cultures, and performance metrics that employees must navigate. Second, the cycle of production and consumption, on which the whole neo-liberal capitalist system is dependent on, is anchored in communication practices such as marketing (Mumby, 2015).

The formation of this system of distinctions is not random, according to a critical viewpoint, rather, it represents a fight between various interest groups to establish a meaning system in which some worldviews are valued above others. Therefore, the dominant social group (or coalition of groups) is the social group that is best able to develop an ideological meaning structure that advances its own objectives (Foucault, 1980; Mumby & Stohl, 1991). In CCO thinking symbolic accounts of power are frequently more sophisticated than material ones (Ashcraft et al., 2009), leading to the idea that power emerges as a consequence of discursive conflicts rather than economic pressures (Deetz & Mumby, 1990). Because they form the foundation of all social interactions, and political concepts like authority (Taylor, 2009), power and control are of great importance to organizations (Kuhn & Jackson, 2008).

Charles Perrow's work (1986) highlights how prevalent the issue of power and how pervasive its role in modern society is. Mumby (2015) argues that whether social scientists are aware of it or not, social scientists (of any methodological bent) are intimately entangled in this issue. However, rarely have CCO studies accounted for how manifesting power shapes organizational reality (Putnam & Nicotera, 2010). Indeed, issues of power, control, and resistance

have significantly shaped the subject of organizational communication as well as closely connected fields of organization and management studies. Mumby (2015) argues that the entire history of management thought has been predicated on the development of theories and models that address the power dynamics of organizational life, even though critical organization studies scholars have rarely directly addressed the issue of power over the last three decades (Deetz, 1992; Frost, 1980; Putnam et al., 1987; Mumby, 1988); and that instead, experts tend to talk about concepts like "cooperation", "commitment", "leadership" and so on, rather than directly addressing "the problem of human relations in an authoritarian setting" (Mumby, 2015, p. 19). In the next section, I transition from a general understanding of power to Foucault's specific theory of power.

### 3.3. *Power, Foucault, and discourse*

To Foucault, discourse serves as the "crucial way" to exert power since it is more than just a reflection of social reality. To create a disciplined modern society, certain connections between truth, power, and knowledge were formed among people, organizations, and institutions; thus modern subjects were therefore produced and conditioned by the power technologies that governed society (Rose & Miller, 2008). Such a viewpoint is recognized in Foucault's understanding of the interplay between knowledge and power that results in the construction of the individual. He argues that these power-knowledge relations cannot be focused on and studied from a perspective outside of these relations. As stated by Foucault (1979, pp. 27–8), "the subject who knows, the objects to be known, and the modalities of knowledge must be regarded as so many effects of these fundamental implications of power-knowledge and their historical transformations". Consequently, different methods (such as regulations, dressage, hierarchical monitoring, and normalizing judgment) seem to control, and rectify anomalous behaviors. According to Foucault (2002), power is always exerted through networks; it is never localized here or there, and it is never exclusively in the hands of a

select few. Because power relations are numerous, diverse, and at odds with one another, it is also through power that change, resistance, and discontinuity are enabled (Foucault, 1972; Knights & Murray, 1994). According to Foucault's power-knowledge theory, power generates knowledge, and discourse and knowledge have consequences on power and truth. Consent is invariably obtained through power, where knowledge is used, and as a result people become obedient subjects of the systemic meaning-making. Foucault (1972) sees discourse as institutionalized, which makes it systematic. According to this idea, one cannot really just act based on how one feels, instead, the dominant systemic practices constantly govern, or in other words, constrain, one's decision. Power, as observed by Jäger and Maier (2009), defines how discourses and knowledge are formed, hence this relates to the issue of 'how'. However, it also pertains to the question of 'who' has a voice or not, and why that could be the case. According to Foucault, power is always relational and hence the focus on power relations, power is always something that is carried out, from one place to another, between one person and another. Moreover, for Foucault (2002), discourses are "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (p. 54).

Discourse analysis has long been identified with Foucault's work and his take on discourse analysis is rather relevant to the endeavor of this study. In the next paragraphs I will proceed to convey Foucault's look on discourse analysis, however, it must be said that to claim to draw in a Foucauldian discourse analysis bears the danger of having one's work rejected since there is no established model for discourse analysis qua Foucault (Jansen, 2008). According to the Foucauldian view, discourse is an activity, a practice that may very well be started by a single author or individual. However, Foucault (1972) believes that discourses are supraindividual. Meaning that discourses are co-produced by everyone, and no one has complete control over it. For that reason they are not stagnant, but always mutating (Jagger & Maier, 2009). Therefore, all people generate

discourse. However, Foucault also defends that those who have the freedom to employ more resources have a greater influence in the production of discourse (Jäger & Maier, 2009).

From a Foucauldian view, discourses are ideologic expressions that create individual and societal awareness, which in turn affects people's behavior. Discourse solidifies knowledge by reflecting, enabling, and shaping social reality via repeated ideas and declarations (Jäger & Maier, 2009). Furthermore, these discourses that replicate power relations become normalized, and participants may not necessarily be aware of these linkages (Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, 2011). According to this view, people behave in response to wider discourses, and they do it either with acceptance, opposition, or compromise (Doolin, 2002). Foucault tells us that discourses are first formed, then they serve to limit subsequent dialogue, and this is evident on efforts that focus on silencing certain individuals or viewpoints. Language thus becomes a tool for social control and power.

In Foucault's thinking (1980), discourses serve to create a certain organizational 'regime of truth' in which members of the organization are also objectified into doing what they do. Inspired by Foucauldian theories, Jäger and Maier (2009) argue that discourse and power are intertwined and "as flows of knowledge through time and space, discourses determine the way in which a society interprets reality and further organizes linguistically and non-linguistically performed discursive practices" (p. 117). Foucault's take on discourse leads us to both ontological and epistemological considerations, since the discourses that make the object, also constitute the knowledge and the practices used to discipline the object (Foucault, 1972).

### *3.3.1. Foucault and organizations*

Authors go as far as situating politics, or Foucauldian power-knowledge relationships (Deetz, 2003), as the main driver of organizational life (Knights & Murray, 1994). Foucault's

genealogical approach to the formation of discourses, practices, authority, and subjectivities is a central theme in many organizational discourse studies (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004; Jian et al., 2008). Discourses have a role in the dismantling and reassembling of organizations while serving as areas of dominance and opposition. A Foucauldian approach may contribute to the organizational debate by demonstrating how particular behavioral and linguistic activities are given preferential treatment by legitimate authority and result in subtle kinds of social control (Barker, 1993; Brown & Coupland, 2005). Power-knowledge interactions are the outcome of a set of opportunities and limitations that are produced by discursive constructs that are entrenched in material conditions and resources, which permit certain acts and forbid others. Circumstances are discursively created and mobilized by organizational actors, who enable some actions while preventing others (Foucault, 2002). These interactions allow for the continuous production, replication, and transformation of organizations (Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, 2011).

In sum, if (organizational) reality is communicated into existence, and if the power-knowledge construct happens in communication, to understand how reality is being communicated into existence, one must look for power structures and ideologies hidden in discourse. As power relations are present in every organizational practice, then we must study this problem from a critical approach that will reveal ideological foundations, traits of dominance, and systems of oppression that ultimately can give insights into social phenomenon. Thus, this study will embark on a Foucauldian inspired critical discourse analysis to examine what discourses are being promoted or rejected, why that might be so, who favors from them, and what are the ideological implications of such a communicated reality for society. If discourses are not individual but co-constructed by all actors in a society, (Foucault, 1972; Jäger & Meier 2009), but however, some individuals have more influence than others in the production of meaning (knowledge), thus we

must study the ways leaders talk with a critical approach to gain insights into the discourses that maintain a particular organizational reality.

#### 4. Methodology

To conduct this analysis, I embarked in an interpretative, social constructionist study, leading to a qualitative critical analysis of discourses of leaders around work culture and job satisfaction in the form of semi-structured interviews. The ontological and epistemological approaches of this study lead to an inductive Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of interview transcripts inspired by theories of Foucault in power-knowledge. The interviewees were leaders from various areas with vast experience in the field.

I depart from the Foucauldian understanding that sees ‘Discourse’ not as an individually created but as systemically co-constructed by all actors in society (Foucault, 1972; Jäger & Meier, 2009). If some actors have more influence than others in its production, it made sense to analyze the discourse of Portuguese leaders on the topic of work culture and job satisfaction to get insights into how this organizational reality was being actively communicated into existence. This paper centers itself around the general problem of how the realities of organizational life are constituted through communication. To understand the problem of low job satisfaction, as a student of culture and communication, I chose to explore the cultural and communicational underpinnings behind this social phenomenon. I chose to study the Portuguese work culture as this culture showed consistently low job satisfaction levels when compared to its European counterparts. The guiding question of this study was: what are the discourses that leaders articulate around Portuguese work culture and how do these discourses relate to low job satisfaction? This section will explain in detail the research design, the method of data collection and method of analysis for this study.

#### 4.1. *Ontological and epistemological standing*

This study is ontologically grounded in social constructionism. Ontology raises questions regarding the nature of reality, what constitutes truth (Gemma, 2018). The following quote from Susan Strega (2005) finely illustrates the ontological underpinnings of critical discourse analysts: "Reality is about the meaning that people create in the course of their social interactions; the world is not about facts but about the meaning attached to facts, and how people negotiate and create meaning" (p. 206). Therefore, social reality exists in a discursive sense; it only has meaning when we talk about it. As a result, this study is not aimed at seeking 'truth' but rather 'meaning', 'understanding', and the ability to affect change. As a social constructionist, in this study of organizations I embrace the CCO perspective which looks at organizational reality as (co)created in communication.

Furthermore, in this study I embrace an interpretivist epistemological stance. Epistemology is concerned with how we come to know what we know. In contrast to positivism, interpretivism argues that truth and knowledge are subjective, culturally and historically situated, and based on people's experiences and their understanding of them. Interpretivist researchers understand that they are invariably influenced by values and beliefs, and these will inevitably inform the way they collect, interpret, and analyze data (Gemma, 2018). According to Strega (2005), "the epistemological foundation of methodology prescribes what good research implicates, justifies why research is done, provides a value base for conducting research, and provides ethical principles for doing so" (p. 211). In this case, the CDA's epistemic commitments are founded both in post-structuralism and critical theories. Language is a key component of post-structural analysis (Meyer & Wodak, 2016), since according to post-structuralists, language is where reality is generated as well as where it may be questioned and challenged (Curtis, 2014). Post-structuralist deconstructive



techniques are useful for recognizing power dynamics and challenging the underlying premises of hegemonic discourses (Kusch, 1989). An interpretative researcher is not concerned with generalizability, replicability or objectivity. In the same way, qualitative findings are not generalizable (findings that extend from the study sample to the population at large); however, they are not intended to be (Denny & Weckesser, 2019). Qualitative research is concerned with why individuals think and act the way they do, how they perceive these complex structures of thought and actions that make their lives. Qualitative research works with non-numerical data, which together with its phenomenological interpretation, are intrinsically linked to subjectivity and human senses. While in quantitative research, human emotions and perspectives from both subjects and researchers are considered undesirable biases confounding results, in qualitative research, the same elements are regarded as essential and inevitable, if not treasured, as they invariably add additional dimensions and colors to enrich the body of findings (Leung, 2015).

In contrast to post-structuralism, which may or may not be politically motivated, critical approaches are openly political and have a definite agenda toward social change (Fonow & Cook, 2005; Gringeri, et al. 2010; Olesen, 2005). To understand current power relations and to identify areas and strategies for change, a critical, interpretative, post-structural epistemology uses post-structuralist theories of language, subjectivity, social processes, and institutions (Weedon, 1997). In sum, critical poststructuralism offers a prism through which taken-for-granted truths can be problematized.

There are three main ways in which CDA is rooted in the ontological and epistemological commitments described above. First, researchers who use CDA refrain from asserting the ultimate impartiality or truthfulness of their conclusions. Beginning with the premise that reality is socially created, a CD analyst rejects the notion of ahistorical "truths" while recognizing the influence of sociopolitical settings and conditions on truths. Since speaking and text occur in larger social,

political, and historical settings, CD analysts ground their analysis in such contexts (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Secondly, CDA centers itself on questions of oppression, power, and social inequality (Fairclough et al., 2013). As a result, CDA is propelled by what Wodak and Meyer (2016) refer to as the ‘critical impetus’. The goal being to actively critique and challenge social processes in addition to understanding and explaining them. Thirdly, the interpretation of texts is underpinned by the theoretical presumption that social behaviors are discursive. In the context of CDA, speech is seen as actively influencing reality rather than just existing as a component of it.

Similarly, Foucault (2002) investigated discourses by exposing the discursive and historical processes by which social activities came to be accepted as natural. From a Foucauldian view, discourses are ideologic expressions that create individual and societal consciousness, which in turn affects people's behavior, and these are the dynamics that this study aims to explore. Discourse solidifies knowledge by reflecting, enabling, and shaping social reality via repeated ideas and declarations (Jansen, 2008), Thus, in this study, I embrace the social constructivist ontology and interpretive epistemology with a critical focus, leading to a qualitative critical inductive study of leaders’ language in practice.

According to Foucault, the discourses of individuals reveal but systemic discourses (knowledge) shared within the culture, thus, in this study I extract the systemic discourses present within the discourses of the participants. Rather than individual positions, each participant’s contribution constitutes a portion of the whole (systemic) organizational reality (Foucault, 1980). Accordingly, in this 9-interview study I attempt to extract and reveal the discourses that maintain such a disagreeable state lived by so many of the country’s workers by examining the discourses of leaders within the culture and then subsequently analyzing them employing a critical discourse analysis inspired by Foucauldian views.

#### 4.2. *The Portuguese case*

Portugal was interesting to study for its unique situation. The country has suffered from a sustained downward trend in job satisfaction levels in the last decades. In parallel, authors have written about the maintenance of an authoritarian style of leadership that has ruled the country even after its fairly recent transition to democracy. This context is relevant to this paper's exploration of the Foucauldian power-knowledge construct, since during the regime the country was kept under utter authoritarian repression, which potentially relates to the fomenting of social stratification which allows for power imbalances and the consequent perpetuation of a cycle of exploitation, as well as to the lack of ability on the behalf of the population to develop a healthy relationship with work, authority, and social equality. A culture's relationship with work is intricately connected to its relationship with freedom in general, and thus this becomes an interesting case for a critical discourse analysis.

#### 4.3. *Method of data collection*

The chosen method of data collection was semi-structured interviews. Interviews are a solidly established method of qualitative analysis in social sciences (Burton, 2000) and was appropriate for the intent of this study. One of the advantages of semi-structured interviews is that they simulate the atmosphere of a normal conversation, in which the participants have the opportunity to expand their thoughts on the topic of discussion. In the first section of a semi-structured interview, the interviewer begins with open, broad questions, to let the interviewees at ease and to encourage them to get their perspective, while staying away from introducing bias. Afterwards, as the interviewee feels valued and listened to, the interviewer can pursue ideas in more depth and use participant's previous probes to get more specific answers to questions. Then, in the

concluding section the interviewer tries to clear any ideas that may need clarification (Naz et al., 2022). The flexibility of semi-structured interviews allows for follow-up questions and an adjustment of the questions as subjects are covered, so to extract more from the interviewees depending on the direction of the conversation.

#### 4.4. *The interviews/interviewees*

Interviews seemed to be the best way to explore the subjective meaning-making process of practitioners. The interviews were semi-structured, as it allowed for open questions and for follow-up questions. The 9 interviews, as seen in the interview guide (appendix A), consisted in: asking their opinions on the country's low job satisfaction rates; then the interview would open to more general matters regarding work culture where the interviewees would expand their thoughts on the country's low job satisfaction rates. I posed the questions in a way that would keep the conversations relevant to the research question, as well as to the theories employed so to obtain the participant's shared concepts, identities, and understandings in relation to the subject, while enabling me to explore at the same time the positioning of these individuals in (big) Discourse. The interviews were done either in the participants' private offices, or in the comfort of their homes. This was an important consideration in the setting of the interviews, as I wanted to engage the interviewees in a place where they would talk freely. Furthermore, I wanted to have this conversation face-to-face where I could first create rapport with the participants, in an environment where I could have a conversation without antagonizing any view, and where I could also present myself in person, as a serious researcher without preconceived judgements or a predetermined agenda, who was eager to learn from their experience and perspectives.

I first invited the participants with a brief explanation of the object of study, and of what to expect from the interviews. After they agreed to be part of the study, I sent an email to all where I

provided: a brief explanation of the topic, the type of questions that they could expect, and some context. I was careful not to incite any viewpoint or bias around the problem, nonetheless, I wanted to provoke an early development of their ideas and curiosity on the topic. The nine interviews gave origin to audio recordings that were transcribed according to the method of Azevedo and colleagues (2017) which resulted in 92 double-spaced pages of transcripts. These interviews were recorded, then transcribed, which means that the data analyzed is not the original speech, but instead the transcribed text, which was subject to my understanding of what was said. The analysis was done in English, therefore I had to translate the quotes from Portuguese to English. As a result, the process of transcription plus the translation into English may have impacted the final data.

I chose to interview experienced leaders because I wanted to expose and explore the dominant managerial discourses being maintained by the local elite embedded in the culture. Since discourses are co-created, systemically recreated and perpetuated by everyone, and no single individual or group holds control over the discourse, I could arguably have interviewed anyone (within the culture) and still be able to extract the discursive practices that constitute reality. However, as Foucault implies, some actors do have more influence than others in this co-creation. Thus, besides possessing a broad view of the discourses due to their vast experience, because of the influential positions they occupied, these participants also had greater agency in the (re)production of these discourses.

I had a direct line of communication with an organizational consultancy firm which gave me the opportunity to contact influential leaders in their broad network of +30 years of experience. I had some options of possible interviewees, I assessed how relevant each one's background was for my endeavor, and I sent e-mails inviting them to be part of this study. The participants are a sample from Portuguese society and therefore contained in them the discourses that permeate the culture. Moreover, they all played influential roles in the actual working reality in Portugal, they worked in

different areas, had different occupations, shared different perspectives, and most importantly, possessed vast knowledge and experience of the Portuguese work culture, and the various organizational problems within this national culture.

Their occupations ranged from an historian who is the president (for over 30 years) of a distinguished local education institution; to a professor Emeritus from Lisbon University with almost 40 years of researching, publishing, and lecturing in organizational studies, specialized in organizational culture, advising both the State, private companies, institutions and researchers in Portuguese work culture; to an HR director; and a CEO. Three of them were also experts that offer consultancy of various kinds to organizations; one of them was a manager in a global renowned multinational with offices in Portugal; and the last, besides having 20+ years of experience managing large teams, was the director of Quality in a major Portuguese company and was responsible for developing many of the protocols and parameters used by this company in intricate operations throughout the world. I am convinced that this sample of qualified people from such different backgrounds, with such a vast experience in Portuguese culture, could provide an accurate view of what constitutes the work culture, and consequently could unveil the systemic discourses that allow for the perpetuation of this environment of low job satisfaction.

#### *4.4.1. Questions*

The aim of the interviews was: first, to get their general feel for the broader discourses around the thematic; and secondly, to challenge them to find explanations to this phenomenon of low job satisfaction. When looking at the text, an analyst must endeavor in making connections from earlier knowledge, then mounting a stance, and then developing arguments that work to explain that position (Paltridge, 2021). Being critical also included using the knowledge learned via inquiry to comprehend the subject from many angles, in reference to pertinent theoretical frameworks in the

field, and considering the socio-historical context. Having this in mind, I asked questions such as: “do you see job satisfaction as an important factor?”; “what do you think are the biggest factors for this low job satisfaction problem in the country”; “what are some of the discourses around workers and leaders, in the media, in schools, at work?”; “how is job satisfaction talked about in corporate meetings?”; “how do workers generally perceive work?”.

#### 4.5. *Methods of data analysis*

##### 4.5.1. *CDA – overview*

In our era, we increasingly live in service and information societies where language and texts are becoming increasingly influential. Influenced by Foucault, Jäger and Maier (2009) point out that power informs how knowledge (discourse) is generated. Accordingly, critical discourse analysis becomes a tool of the utmost relevance in the deconstruction of systemic knowledge (discourse), in examining how it emerges, in revealing the manipulative nature of discursive practices, as well as in the promotion of better communication and of wellbeing in society. The multidisciplinary field of study known as critical discourse analysis (CDA) is the study of power and inequality as expressed and reproduced in text (van Dijk, 2001).

With a focus on the larger social, political, and historical contexts in which talk and text occur, CDA explores how theories of reality and power relations are encoded and enacted in language and is primarily concerned with the (discursive) construction of social phenomena. CDA is focused on a critical examination of social behaviors and the propagation of prevailing ideologies through speech (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Traditional discourse analysis varies from CDA in that the latter problematizes the production of wider social phenomena rather than only analyzing the specifics of language units. CDA not only looks at what the text says but also at what it does. As a

result, CDA investigates the ways in which conceptions of reality and power relations are expressed and performed via language (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). According to Rogers and colleagues (2005), CDA is specifically interested in the ways that "language as a cultural tool mediates relationships of power and privilege in social interactions, institutions, and bodies of knowledge" (p. 376). Methodological diversity in CDA means that different approaches can be used to achieve different methodological aims. For instance, some critical discourse analysts depend simply on existing texts, such as media communication or institutional records, while others use research, such as interviews or ethnography to pursue their objectives (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). Although there are many different methods to CDA, they all strive to expose assumptions, disprove assertions of authority, and expose constructs of power and dominance in texts (Fairclough et al., 2013; Wodak & Meyer, 2016).

#### 4.5.2. *Foucauldian inspired CDA*

In this study, I apply a type of CDA inspired by Foucauldian concepts and theories. In sum, I looked for discursive formations, and reflected on why some discourses were advanced to the detriment of others, while I asked who might gain and lose from each discursive formation. I depart from the Foucauldian premise that meanings are co-constructed by all actors in a society. According to Foucault, knowledge and power are intrinsically related, thus, the maintenance of this systemic discursive formations that perpetuate oppression in widespread discourse is not arbitrarily imposed, but a result of a continuous negotiation where each actor or group tries its best to bring about the reality that best suits its interests. CDA is an interdisciplinary method for studying speech that sees language as a type of social practice and is concerned with the discursive actions that create and sustain inequitable power relations (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). Therefore, CDA is also concerned with the surroundings of texts, such as their historical, cultural, or geographical contexts, as they are



relevant to deconstruct the meaning-making dynamics behind discourse. Similarly, a Foucauldian' discourse analysis shares the critical discourse analyst's concern with the "relationship of language to other social processes, and of how language works within power relations" (Taylor, 2004, p. 436). Thus, this study will employ CDA inspired by a Foucauldian lens as method of analysis, making connections through pattern seeking, uncovering discursive formations of oppression and power imbalances that put into perspective the cultural traits of Portuguese work culture that can potentially explain the low levels of job satisfaction.

#### 4.5.3. *Steps*

It was vital to keep a focus on the specific problem that I was addressing from the moment I started building the interview guide. To conduct the analysis, I first had to become very familiar with the interviews, which meant reading them back and forward and making initial considerations on what I was finding. When reading and rereading the transcripts, I aimed to identify particular discursive formations that pertained to the research problem. My initial focus was on uncovering the discursive formations that potentially enabled the perpetuation of inequality (expressed as low job satisfaction) through systemic discourses. According to Foucault, we are dealing with discursive formations: "whenever one can describe, between a number of statements, such a system of dispersion, whenever, between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices, one can define a regularity (an order, correlations, positions, functionings, and transformations)" (Foucault, 1972, p, 38). Discursive formations must contain four essential elements: assertions that relate to the same object; are expressed in the same way; share a conceptualization system; and have a shared subject or theory (Foucault, 1972). I identified a discursive formation whenever I saw a pattern in discourses relative to meaning-making, to a group of people, a concept, or a type of statement; and whenever I found the same logic and assumptions addressing an issue from the same

perspective, or one in opposition, or that favored or negated a certain narrative. That is what I refer to when I mention a Foucauldian inspired CDA: an analysis of the systemic discourses formations that populate common speech and reveal the dynamics that establish power-knowledge constructs. Furthermore, my choice of research design and data gathering was inspired by Foucault's conceptualization of power-knowledge enacted in discourse. Because power is a precursor to knowledge, it was important to analyze the discourses (knowledge) uttered by the most resourceful and influential. That is why I thought it would be insightful to interview the leaders with the most experience and influence, the ones with greater agency and advantage in the production of discourse. In conclusion, I paid attention to how texts were given meaning and how this meaning-making contributed to the formation of social reality (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 4).

My intent with this study was to identify prevailing discursive formations, as well as to look for inconsistencies, to reveal prevailing hegemonic practices, and expose discourses that perpetuate social inequality, such as: utterances of normalized dictatorial power and narratives of complacent conformity towards power abuses. CDA draws attention to issues of power imbalances, deception, exploitation, and structural injustices, it combines discourse critique with an explanation of how it fits into and contributes to the current social reality. This stance enabled me to expose systematic discursive mechanisms that permit power inequalities to exist, it brings to light the relationship of language to other social processes and shows how language works within power relations. This methodology allowed me to objectively deconstruct the text and examine who had a voice and who did not and the wider implications of these dynamics. In this analysis I described, explained, demonstrated and reflected on the purposes and effects of different kinds of language, while having in mind its relevance to the research problem, the socio-historical context, and the literature and theories in which this study was grounded. In the following paragraphs, I will give a detailed overview of the systematic procedure that I engaged in when doing the analysis. However, as a

multidisciplinary and diverse area of study, CDA does not have an accepted formula, a consensual overarching theoretical viewpoint, or fundamental techniques that all CD analysts must follow (Leotti et al., 2022).

This was a six-step process. First, as already mentioned, I read the transcripts thoroughly to get acquainted with the material. This step involved close examination of various elements, such as words, sentences, paragraphs, and the overall structure of the text. At the same time, I was relating these elements to attributes and themes relevant to the research question. Secondly, I specifically looked for patterns (i.e. discursive formations) and organized them as to pertinence to the research question. These patterns came in the form of regularities, either in terms of order, correlations, positioning as to the subject, assertions expressed in the same way, and with shared conceptualization systems (Foucault, 2002). Then, I identified the prevailing discourses of work and job satisfaction among the participants. I carefully analyzed all the moments they talked about work, the employees, power relations, the relationship with power and other statements that could bring insights into an understanding of this discursive reality which produced low job satisfaction. I identified them not only in accordance with Foucault's concept of discursive formations, but also reflecting how well they addressed the research question within the theoretical framework I embraced.

On the fourth step, I reflected on the main discursive formations that emerged in relation to the entirety of the texts, bearing in mind if these main discourses represented the whole of what had been said and how well they addressed the research question. During this phase, I also looked for ways in which the discourses were interconnected (for ex.: power imbalances and incoherences). On the fifth step, I reviewed the results and drew arguments. Once I had assigned attributes to elements in the material, I reflected once again on the results to examine the function and meaning of the language used. Here, while drawing conclusions that provided answers to the guiding

question, I also reflected on the choice of the method of analysis in relation to the broader context that I had established earlier and how it had guided me. On the sixth and last step, I summarized the discourses that emerged, and proceeded to argue and demonstrate how the meaning-making in each discourse could explain the manifested reality of low job satisfaction. Four major discourses emerged from this method: discourses of job satisfaction, of workers, of leaders and of work culture.

#### 4.6. *Ethical considerations*

To make sure I was complying with the ethical requirements for this study, the participants signed a consent form (Appendix B) where they gave their consent for data to be collected, where they were informed of the participant's rights, and where I guarantee the strict protection of their identity. They were duly informed of the intent of the interview and that they could abandon it at any time, as well as consult the transcript of their interview, and have their participation removed from the study if they decided to. As Jäger and Maier (2009) note, as an analyst I was not outside the discourses. This emphasizes the point that we are all products of discourses, thus I was aware that I could not study the discourses without being influenced by them. Moreover, even though discourse analytical research is always three-dimensional thus all text and context should be considered, it is also true that I had to choose the data I would be using since "no researcher can study everything" (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 19). Due to the limitations placed on empirical research in terms of time, human and material resources, I was prevented from dealing with all the facets of discourse theory in equal depth. Even with ample resources, discourses are extremely complicated and cannot ever be fully investigated. For the sake of making the data manageable, subsets of texts were thus chosen. Notwithstanding, a wider body of literature was taken into consideration for the analysis.

#### 4.7. *Study limitations*

The interviews were recorded in Portuguese, which is my first language. They were transcribed according to the chosen method (Azevedo et al., 2017), and then analyzed in English (my second language). This means that data analyzed is not the original speech, but instead the transcribed text of the recorded interviews, and that the quotes and their meanings had to be translated by the researcher, which infers to it a degree of interpretation, additional to the interpretation already intrinsic to CDA. The process of transcription plus the analysis in a different language may have impacted the final data. Nevertheless, I was careful to always abstain from leaps of interpretation and to stand neutral so that the data would remain as true to the original as possible. Furthermore, I tried to put together an eclectic sample of leaders and I asked them general questions about Portuguese work culture that I thought were relevant, however, had the sample and the questions been different, the findings could have also been different.

#### 4.8. *Rigor and quality criteria*

Since replicating the precise settings of the original research necessitates constructing conditions that are frequently impractical in the real world, it is challenging to apply replication to qualitative investigations (Seadle, 2018). Nonetheless, like all other types of research, this analysis was conducted in accordance with a stated set of theoretical presuppositions and particular research questions that built on those theoretical orientations. Despite these obstacles, I believe that I was able to conduct a thorough and systematic analysis in a way that is consistent with CDA's epistemological framework. This study will look at the discourses of leaders and analyze them using a Foucauldian inspired CDA. I develop this methodology to explore the question of what are

the discourses that leaders articulate around Portuguese work culture and how do these discourses relate to low job satisfaction? The next section will present the outcome of the analysis, and the findings of this study.

## **5. Analysis:**

In this section I will present my analysis of the main discursive formations. After conducting a Foucauldian inspired Critical Discourse Analysis, what emerged were four main discursive formations that leaders articulated around Portuguese work culture and pertaining to low job satisfaction. The first formation is ‘discourses about job satisfaction’; the second is ‘discourses about employees’; the third is ‘discourses about leadership’; the fourth is ‘discourses of work culture’. In this section I will review them in detail and offer a critical assessment of each discourse in four sub sections. In a fifth sub section, I will be gathering all discourses to consider how they might relate to low job satisfaction.

### *5.1. Discourses of job satisfaction:*

In this section, I will be covering how participants viewed job satisfaction. Across the interviews, participants express the value of job satisfaction in several different ways. This was my first question, as I wanted to understand the participants’ stance regarding the premise that ‘job satisfaction is important for the organization’. They all considered it to be an important factor for the organization. For instance, Ana, a communication consultant with decades of experience, when asked about the importance of job satisfaction for the success of the organization, states: “One thing is true, is that a satisfied worker is a productive worker”. Maria, a manager in a renowned multinational company with offices in Portugal, reflected in the importance of the issue: “For me it

is super important that people are satisfied. I think there's a consensus that it's way better to have a motivated team than an unmotivated team". Lara, a HR director, agreed with this sentiment by saying: "I truly believe so (that job satisfaction is important)". Gertrudes, a consultant with decades of experience in leading teams and in giving training in leadership, expressed the same opinion: "I have no doubt that an environment with committed, satisfied workers, with the ability to have a decent personal life with their salary, that they produce better. I don't think it can be questioned, it's self-evident". Frederico, the president of an established local institution for more than 30 years, shared the importance the workers well-being and feeling of belonging, and how that can benefit the organization: "You need to make the person really, sincerely feel that they are part of something... that they are an important link in the chain. And that is important for her, for others, for the company". Joel, a consultant with decades of experience in team-building, expressed how job satisfaction was determinant in the country's ability to compete: "I am convinced that job satisfaction is indeed important, and I think it is at the core of our competitiveness problem with neighboring economies". Adelino, an Emeritus professor with almost 40 years of experience in the field of HR, also commented in the importance of job satisfaction for the success of the organizations: "That's without a doubt, I don't have the slightest doubt about it". Antonio, the director of quality of a major national firm, when talking about the importance of job satisfaction, asserted the following: "Absolutely, absolutely... at all different levels of performance, satisfaction is the most important thing, the economic counterpart is secondary... it only becomes primary in the face of economic and social pressure". Lastly, Rui, the CEO of a multinational market leader with base in Portugal, when answering whether job satisfaction was important for organization performance, also concurred: "I believe this is really important. If the worker is well, he will work better, and organizations are made of people".

Overall, all the participants considered job satisfaction to be a factor of the utmost importance for organizations. The fact that this group of leaders clearly express that job satisfaction is important sets the frame for all the other discourses covered in the interviews, and one cannot conclude that this problem of low job satisfaction is due to people's lack of understanding of its importance, as is not the case here. If job satisfaction is considered to be important, then what is being done to improve it? Despite the apparent genuine feeling among the participants that job satisfaction is vital for the organization, in my assessment of the importance of this discourse I found no real urgency to solve this problem. It is clear that people recognize job satisfaction's importance, however, the problem seems to remain unaddressed. This conundrum begged more exploration, and other discourses could potentially provide insights into this dilemma. I thus took the question deeper to understand why this problem was not being addressed. I probed deeper into the discourses that constituted the culture concerning major themes, by asking their view on workers, how leadership was portrayed, and how they talked about work.

## *5.2. Discourses of workers*

The second discursive formation that emerged was 'views on workers'. There were certainly various factors to consider in this matter, one of the most important ones being the 'workers factor'. I asked the participants to share what discourses are generally portrayed around employees, how workers were talked about in board meetings, in the media, at a dinner table, and in relationship to this reality of low job satisfaction. The discourses about workers were generally derogatory. This is seen in three interrelated discourses: workers as clueless; workers as lazy and underserving; and workers portrayed as inconsequential, incapable and unwilling to act to improve their conditions. This section will review these discourses in detail.



In the first sub discourse, participants reveal a narrative that sees workers as ignorant and clueless. Ana mentions: “If I asked some workers what they actually did, they had no idea... regarding the alienation of work, there is ignorance. Workers fail to understand... I don't think they are awake, they don't even know”. On the same note, Gertrudes goes on to say: “I would say they are not aware of the problem of alienation at work, otherwise they would react... it's too serious, they probably have no idea”. This discourse, besides reflecting the reality of workers who are not engaged, uninformed, it unveils a certain (perhaps subconscious) condescence towards workers in every day speech. This kind of narrative allows and sustains a reality of disempowered workers, as it holds an expectation of workers as ignorant and clueless.

The second discourse often expressed in the interviews was an idea of workers portrayed by leaders as lazy, as unprepared, uninterested and undeserving. When questioned about these discourses around workers, Gertrudes said: “There is a certain view that people are not interested in this... that it's their fault... there is a certain tendency to say: ‘it's their fault’, ‘they don't come prepared’, ‘they don't want to learn’, ‘they are lazy’... this speech still has some weight in the discussions”. Ana corroborates this image: “they don't work, they don't care”. Joel talks about workers seen as ungrateful: “Managers think that there is a certain... let's say “ingratitude”, or lack of loyal involvement on the part of workers that does not justify this investment in them”; and Lara conveys an image of workers as undeserving: “they (leaders) do not think they (workers) deserve better”.

On the third sub discourse, participants portrayed discourses of employees who are not engaged and who are unwilling to improve. Ana commented: “the worker expects to be told what to do in all situations”; while Maria adds: “the employee likes to avoid conflicts, confrontation... because it causes less headaches for everyone... maybe if I point out flaws I'll also have to improve, and if I don't say anything, I have no problems”. Gertrudes also talks about uninvolved workers

who will not take “a single action” and about “an idea that workers have to motivate themselves”:  
“I think there is also a lack of involvement... I see workers who don’t like to work in a place and say that the leadership doesn’t work, that it’s all rubbish... but they don’t take a single action to change. I think we (leaders) still haven’t overcome a certain idea that workers have to motivate themselves and manage alone”. Antonio follows this discourse with remarks of employees unwilling to change and inconsequential: “most people think ‘I won’t bother myself explaining and trying to change everything, I prefer to adapt and try to live with the little I can’. Workers do not say publicly what they think and what they want. They say one thing and then do another”; and Rui confirms with the following observation: “The seed of ambition, for evolution, through work, was never germinated in Portuguese workers. Workers don’t want to go beyond what they must do, because they don’t get paid for that and so they don’t bother. This lack of ambition on the behalf of the worker generates disinterest”. The combined discourses towards employees reveals a disparaging view of workers held in everyday discourse. Workers are portrayed as lesser: incapable, oblivious, unprepared, unworthy, not involved, ungrateful, disloyal, inconsequential, unwilling and unable to improve their situation.

It must be said that the participants were not necessarily voicing their opinions when conveying these discourses, they were acknowledging the narratives portrayed around workers, at the same time, by acknowledging and conveying this discourses one could argue that they were also contributing to the perpetuation of the problem. The participants answered according to their experience of the discursive reality, not to how they portray employees or how they operate. They were sharing their perception of the prevailing discourses, not necessarily their stance. On the contrary, without exception, all the interviewees were sensitive to the problematic of such discourses and conveyed them precisely to highlight a problem. However, one can also argue that the participants are within discourse, like everyone, and that by repeating, or even understanding

how these discourses come to be, they are recreating and perpetuating them. This can be seen, for example, on Ana's statement when she says that there is a "infantilized way" of dealing with workers; yet then she comments that the workers always "expect to be told what do"; and then she goes on saying that workers have "no idea" of what they are doing, that they are "not awake", and that they are "ignorant" and "fail to understand" work alienation. This is just an example of how, even unintendedly and perhaps at a subconscious level, the participant is justifying in some way the "infantilized vision" of workers that she criticizes. In the last section of the analysis, I will be discussing how this way of talking about workers might be a factor in job satisfaction. In the meantime, in the next section I will be presenting the discourses that emerged around leadership.

### *5.3. Discourses on Leadership*

Various discourses emerged of the perception of the participants towards Portuguese leaders. Ironically, it appears that leadership is also talked about in a negative light. In the same way as towards employees, it was fundamental to learn the discourses around leaders, as various studies indicate a close relationship between leadership styles and employee well-being (Belias & Koustelios, 2014). These discourses of leadership to blame for low job satisfaction emerged at multiple levels and are seen in two interrelated discourses: 'leader's incompetence', where we learn about a generalized perception of weak leadership; and 'separation between workers and leaders', where I review the participants' depiction of an (autocratically) enforced distance between workers and leaders.

### *5.3.1. Leader's incompetence*

Nearly all participants expressed at some point what they portrayed to be an incompetent leadership class. Ana said it right away: “I think it (low job satisfaction) is intrinsically linked to leadership or, in this case, to the weak leadership that exists in Portuguese companies... I think this is really a problem of bad leadership... Portuguese entrepreneurs are people with a relatively low level of education”. Frederico was of the same opinion when it came to leaders’ competence: “We have a ruling class that is not sufficiently well trained. The panorama of our ruling classes, of our patronage let's call it that, is not exactly people who have a cosmopolitan formation, a high culture... In the European context, our leadership class is the least qualified in percentage”. Gertrudes expressed somewhat of the same opinion and added that besides lacking qualification, leaders are seemingly not interested in improving themselves: “I would say that there is a qualification deficit on the part of entrepreneurs and managers. I worked for many years in the design and planning of continuous training for leaders and entrepreneurs... and it is very difficult for them to make time available to participate in training... I don't know if it's because they think they already know everything or if it's because they don't have time, but the truth is it's that difficult to get them to participate”. And António went even further to say: “The immediate comment regarding leadership is always pejorative. In my opinion, the leaders are working in the opposite direction... The leaders in Portugal do economic management instead of leadership”.

The next sub discourse on leadership concerns leadership’s failure to engage workers, which is arguably one of leaders’ main jobs (Voon et al., 2011). We learn that besides failing to establish a line of communication with workers, leaders fail to include them as part of the organization. Gertrudes conveys a lack of internal communication in organizations where employees are not made aware of the companies’ projects: “internal communication, I would say... in the vast majority of companies... is very poorly worked, or not worked at all. So many companies have very

interesting projects related to the community, where people within the company don't even know about". When asked to share what were some of the faults of leadership in most organizations, Joel commented: "it's mostly that workers do not feel that the company is also theirs... and they do not feel that they are rewarded for what they do". On the same note, Antonio agrees and goes further to describe an environment where leaders exclude employees: "People do not feel part of the organization. They are simply developing a job, not getting involved in the process. In Portugal, leaders do not include people in the team and leave them out". These last remarks link to the next sub discourse where we learn that not only are leaders portrayed to be incompetent and incapable of engaging workers in the organization, but that there is also a discourse of generalized separation between leadership and workers.

### *5.3.2. Separation between leaders and workers*

Participants raised concerns about the difficulties in communication between workers and leadership, saying that within Portuguese culture, communication only flows downwards. Frederico is very direct in his affirmation: "It is not possible to communicate upwards, we know that company's communication only happens from the top to the bottom". Similarly, Antonio added: "We have a practice with workers that is: 'manage yourself as well as possible... think twice before you bother the boss with questions'". When analyzing Maria's discourse, I found the same narrative. While the participant repeatedly said how much she valued "assertive" communication with peers and subordinates: "I try to be more assertive and as transparent as possible. I think that if people are not responding accordingly, they should find out, explaining why and adjusting expectations", at the same time, she complained of a lack of transparency and assertiveness from top-management: "I think this is another thing that creates a lot of frustration, the fact that communication is not transparent when we go to meetings with top-management ... at the end you

probably take home a sentence... everything else is flowers and butterflies. The further up you go, you have these politics, and when you see these large meetings there is no transparency or assertiveness at all". Being that the participant was so vocal about assertiveness (concept that she mentioned six times) and transparency, one comes to wonder why she would not speak up and ask for explanations to "adjust" hers and everyone's "expectations" as she affirmed in her previous remark. This instance illustrates how much these discourses are protected by everyone's action, at all the different tiers of power, where even when people are vocal about transparency they will not demand it from those higher in power.

The following sub discourse was very present in the interviews, it is about the prevalence and the negative impacts of a widespread authoritarian stance that the generality of the Portuguese leaders adopts. Lara tells us: "the attitude is: "I pay you to work, you have to work and that's it". Ana talks about a condescending paternalistic attitude from leaders who view workers as slaves: "There is a power relationship and a relationship of... almost between paternalism and a certain dictatorial attitude (towards the worker). An almost 'slavery' view is very present... even today there's the maintenance of a petty boss leadership. 'I command and you only do what I tell you'", and Antonio adds: "Most bosses see their role as one of exercising power, and so their focus is on dynamics of that power, and that is not productive". Joel says that this authoritarian approach is very much a current practice: "there are still many who have a Tayloristic, authoritarian, directorial view of work and think that for people to work they only need to be well commanded" and talks about "a relationship with alienated work, of mere authoritarianism... which is a poor, reductive relationship. In my opinion, in many cases, it also explains the low productivity and other phenomena related to work". Professor Adelino, who trained many successful leaders, also argued that this authoritarian reality was responsible for the country's low productivity: "They do not abdicate from power... and they think this is normal. That's why our productivity is very low and

will continue to be. It is the idea that: ‘I am on top, I am in charge’”. Antonio goes on to describe an even more disturbing reality, in his comment: “They (leaders) comply with the minimum requirements of the laws that condition the free exercise of slavery, and from then on, they are no longer concerned. The bosses avoid giving up power at all costs, and if there is any reason that puts the leadership in question, instead of giving carrots, they employ the whip... instead of being the leader working and providing what the workers need, the boss sees this relationship as ‘they are working for me’”. On the same note, Frederico, trained as an historian, reflects on this enforced separation: “the boss exercises a manorial power, an absolute, feudal power over the workers, saying: ‘I’m in charge, this is mine, you do as I want’! We know that here there is a lot of that idea that the individual (leader), more than exercising power, wants subservience, that blind deference“. The prevalence of narratives such as: “paternalism”, “manorial power”, “absolute, feudal power over the workers”, and “slavery” shows a widespread autocratic reality in the workplace, which everyone knows to be a serious problem, at the same time there seems to be no hint that the problem is being addressed.

Participants often discussed a strong resistance towards participatory practices on the behalf of leaders. Joel mentioned a “culture of skepticism regarding the adoption of participatory dynamics”, and affirmed that within his vast experience in consulting, he visited many organizations where “there was no experience of participatory practices, of people being heard about anything... even people who worked there for decades, no one had ever asked them anything”. Ana explains that there is a strong resistance to a flattening of the hierarchies: “We continue to be a country with a strong hierarchy and very afraid of a participatory leadership. There is a fear of giving power to those below. Because those on the bottom might want more and then might fight to get it”, with which Rui agrees: “allowing a participatory leadership leads to the loss of absolute power, and there are many bosses who like to feel the power”; and Frederico depicts the same

attitude: “The boss is the one who puts the machine to work without having to give professionals the autonomy... to give them wings to fly... sometimes leadership doesn’t even want that”. According to them, the ones in power are very protective of their absolute positions and it is not in their interest to have more participation than the ones they can control. These discourses describe a scenario where leaders are afraid to loosen their grip on power and will resist any attempt of a more participatory type of leadership that could lead to “the loss of absolute power”.

Besides portraying an image of leaders who are authoritarian and resistant to participatory approaches, the participants express that the leadership’s tendency for an autocratic approach culminates in the active suppression of workers’ participation. Participants describe an organizational scenario of inhibited and coerced expression, as Professor Adelino recounts: “The structure that is normally implemented, instead of opening up to the team, it inhibits innovation, coerces it... prevents it from being expressed”. Maria’s depicts a similar situation: “They (leaders) don’t allow employees to explore other things that give them wings to fly in other directions... that, for companies, is sometimes good because they have a solid person there working on what they are supposed to and nothing else... they’re not asking for more. That’s good for companies because they don’t have to manage expectations”. Ana surprised me when she said: “I can’t show my bosses that I know a lot otherwise he thinks I’m a threat and might lynch me”, however, Rui, the CEO, also confirmed this discourse: “In many companies, if an employee gives an opinion on a work issue, the leadership finds it a challenge... and this results in the castration of people’s thinking and participation. If they (leaders) castrate people’s creative freedom, they don’t run the risk of this person fleeing to another organization or taking their leadership position. This means that workers do not give opinions because it is not worth it, nor will the bosses consider hearing any opinions”. The combined discourses reveal an image of leaders who are not fit for the job, and who enforce a separation between them and the workers. Furthermore, we learn that workers live in an oppressive



authoritarian environment installed by the majority of leaders, where any attempt to participate is suppressed. In the last section, I discuss how these discourses might play a role in the low levels of job satisfaction. In the meantime, in the next section, I will present the participants' discourses surrounding work culture.

#### *5.4. Discourses of Culture*

The literature shows that besides leadership, it is in the culture that we find the key to the development of job satisfaction and motivated workers (Shahab & Nisa 2014). Accordingly, the last main discursive formation that I cover in this analysis is related to the underlying cultural discourses that pervade Portuguese organizations. These discourses of culture emerged at multiple levels and are seen in three interrelated discourses: at the level of a culture of segregation between classes with status and nepotism being at the forefront of the workplace dynamics; concerning a culture of unchallenged absolute authority, where workers are conformed to their situation due to fear of reprisals; and at the level of the relationship with work within the culture, where participants talk about how work is seen and how workers representatives are negatively portrayed.

To begin with, I will cover the participants' description of a widespread segregation in society that stretches to the workplace where status signaling and nepotism are very prevalent. Lara explains the culture of extensive formality: "We are very formal, we give a lot of importance to titles". When hierarchy is so entrenched, it is normally supported by some form of distinction signal, in the case of the military it would be by ranks, in the corporation it would be by the office one holds, in this case, the recognition comes in the form of titles, which normally refer to a person's formal education and to their positions within families or groups of influence. Gertrudes confesses that this reality is still very much present: "This weight of the formalism of the "doctors" (people with university degrees) that remains until today... and then the always present hierarchical

distance”. According to Antonio, this is just a sign of the widespread segregation that affects organizations: “There is a bipolarization of society between those who are doing very well and those who are doing very poorly... there is segregation among the workers themselves... and we all know that. The management of favors is what creates the little groups, the cronies. There is a big separation... and this separation is accepted by those below... because, in some cases, there is the expectation of being able to rise to that condition, to integrate that group, climb that step and start looking at others from above. Here in Portugal, we see business dynamics still in a family concept, in which anyone who is a member of the family is ahead of anyone who is not a member of the family”. Rui, who had to climb his way up through these politics confirms: “some were born to serve, others to be served: employees and bosses”. Additionally, Professor Adelino further explains how these dynamics are very well established in the organization, that the creation of “otherings” between those on the top and those on the bottom is well-engrained and starts early in ones’ career: “in Portugal, any student can pass in school... and when he has graduated, he wants to go to the top of the ladder ... and when entering through the middle/top of the scale, he looks down on the others... This is deadly for the company's culture, as it creates ‘us’ and ‘them’ “. Frederico, a president of an education institution and trained as an historian, explains how old dynamics still persist to the present day: “There has never been a violent rupture of this system... The bulk of the class who benefited by the regime remained and continued to benefit ... and reproduced. There is a certain continuity, there are still names and families that for centuries have been perpetuated as people of power, as important... of course there is mobility, but the structure remains with the same vices”. He goes on to tell how engagement is underrated compared to one’s network: “Engagement in Portugal is insignificant for those who matter” ... What matters is to have a good network, agreeing with those in charge, dancing to the music and not being worried about these stories of engagement... There is favoritism, and there is cronyism... engagement is not recognized”.

According to him, the segregation is so deep, and unfair treatment so widely accepted, that leaders do not care about workers' engagement, as they know they are not evaluated by their results and competence, but instead by their network and affluence. Engagement thus becoming insignificant for "those who matter". In this sub discourse the participants talk about a culture of widespread segregation that breaks organizations into those who "matter" and look the "others" from above, and those who "were born to serve". According to the participants, the importance of titles, status and the prevalence of nepotism seem to outshine important factors such as competence and engagement.

In the next sub discourse, the participants depicted a culture of unquestionable authoritarianism and reverence to authority left by the country's recent dictatorial regime in which many of them lived. The participants often referred to the country's socio-historical background to explain some of the cultural traits of the working environment. According to them, the decades long dictatorial regime that the country lived in until 1974 is still in many ways rooted in the collective and affecting how the culture deals with authority and inequality. They recurrently referred to this period to explain the workplace dynamics, as seen in Ana's comment: "It has to do with the culture we had of 50 years of dictatorship, this is very ingrained ... how it impacted us ... it's still pervasive". They talk about how authority was at the center of the regime's values: "in Salazar's (the dictator) time there was a great maxim: 'one does not discuss the homeland or authority'. Authority was a basic principle of Salazarism". Joel also lived same reality: "I'm 57 years old, I was born before the 25th of April (the revolution), I went to school before the 25th of April, and I understand well the culture of obedience, the culture of someone who commands us"; and Antonio completes the scenario: "perhaps due to the period of political pressure that we experienced under Salazarism, Portugal did not create this social DNA of claiming, of saying no, of asking for rights, of limits... in work and life in general. On that past, you couldn't even speak, if you spoke you

would be arrested... and changing this culture takes time". The interviewees talk about a culture of unquestionable authority still very present from the time of the dictatorial regime where people "could not even speak", and how that mentality still affects the current organizational culture.

Another prevalent sub discourse that emerged was of a culture of conformism with the current situation enhanced by a generalized fear of becoming unemployed. When asked about why people do not improve their conditions, Gertrudes replied: "we are taught to not 'make waves', as they say". On the same note, Frederico comments that the overarching discourse portrays everyone as being "easily replaceable", which explains why no one would raise waves and risk their "replaceable" position. This results in a generalized suppression of complaints and divergent opinions, as Joel affirms: "This makes people have some reservations in admitting that they have different thoughts, that they do not agree with the majority, or with those in charge". Lara concurs and describes a scenario of deeply ingrained subservience within the culture: "culturally, I think we are very subservient, I think it's really part of us. A lot of people are almost ashamed of succeeding at something, because it doesn't look good, you have got to be humble. Most people are afraid... There is still a lot of the idea that 'you are lucky to have a job'... then people do not complain because they know they will leave and there is always someone who accepts the job, always". Antonio goes on to explain how people are convinced that they have to accept the poor conditions they work in, and how fearful they are of what might happen to them if they do not comply: "People are bombarded with the worst possible scenarios, they are charged with fear that this will happen to them: a disgrace, a scandal, being out of a job... and any action requires commitment, so nobody is willing to sacrifice that extra work when they don't even believe that it can work, and so they don't bother... and keep the status they've known their whole lives. And if there is any reason that puts leadership in question, instead of giving carrots, they (bosses) give the whip. Workers do nothing because they are afraid... they are afraid". Rui agrees and explains what this results in: "This makes

people not believe in themselves, in their ability to improve their condition... even because our education has always been based on punishment, not on the basis of encouragement... (workers) are used to being punished instead of being motivated ... we were educated since the time of our great-grandparents when they told us to simply go to work and without ‘making too many waves’ “. In this sub discourse, I review the participant’s discourses of “subservience” and “fear” based on the difficulty to find a job, and the potential and social, economic consequences of going through the perils of unemployment, which leads to an uncomfortable conformity, where workers do not speak out of fear for the consequences of doing it. This an unfortunate but expectable reality, as power presupposes control, and this control often comes in the form of discourses of fear that keep people “subservient” to power and afraid of the consequences of challenging it.

The next sub discourse under examination concerns participant’s take on how the perceptions around work. The implications of this discursive formation are of the highest relevance as one cannot understand job satisfaction in the culture without understanding the meanings around work. The discourse that often emerged in the interviews was how, within the Portuguese culture, work was generally perceived as something negative. In the participants’ discourses, work was portrayed as nothing more than a means to achieve money and status, a matter of survival that brings no self-realization by itself. The participants repeatedly referred to the reason behind the low job satisfaction as being an economic one, and this explanation is better understood when we see how often work is referred to a solely a means to earn money. I first heard it in Maria’s speech: “From my perspective, the first dissatisfaction is with the economic part”; while Antonio corroborated: “if you asked people, 99% of respondents would answer this problem (of low job satisfaction) with: ‘because people don't earn enough’”. and Joel concurred: “the main question is because the work is not sufficiently remunerated”. Moreover, besides the economic gain, the discourses portrayed by the participants reveal that work, in Portuguese culture, serves no other

personal or societal purpose. Lara, the HR director, explains: “It’s seen as a necessary evil... you don't see it as something that can bring you satisfaction”. Gertrudes agrees with the sentiment: “It’s very common in conversations to hear: ‘if I could retire, that’s all I would want’. In fact, I think that there are many people who experience the context of work today as a punishment, and not as a space for development and personal fulfillment. I think that there is a large percentage of the Portuguese population who experience work as a survival factor... and not as a place where you perform and build your life, from a global point of view, as a human being... contributing to society, etc.”. Besides being only a means to survive with no personal other personal or societal purposes, work is apparently seen as a “struggle”, as elucidated in Antonio’s remarks: “most people who work do not see it as a possibility of growth. When people talk about work, they talk about a struggle, work is a struggle!”; and seen in Rui’s take on the relationship with work: “The vast majority of the population works in response to pain, not in search of pleasure... it's basically to pay bills. People work to receive at the end of the month and nothing else”. Ana also depicts this reality and reflects on the Catholic influence on this vision of work: “It’s above all an appropriation of a status quo... so people see it as an obligation... there is not a Calvinist or Lutheran view like in the Northern countries where work is a path to salvation. The vision here is if there are indulgences to the church... if I pay... I can still win heaven”. In this discourse, participants portray work as a necessary evil, as a struggle, which serves no other societal or personal purpose than a pecuniary interest, which, according to Ana, is all it takes to “win heaven”.

In the search for uncovering leader’s discourses around work, the last discourse in analysis relates to how worker representation is talked about. The participants overwhelmingly portrayed worker representation in a negative light, as Lara affirms: “unions are never well regarded”, and Frederico agrees: “Today if you say you’re a unionist 90% of the population looks at you with disbelief”. There seems to be a strong discourse in the culture that portrays unions as highly

politicized and extremist, as conveyed in Ana's words: "workers' representatives are still very feuded to the communist party"; and in Joel's comment: "people feel this idea that unions are extremist... that it's only for highly politicized people... and they see the logic of the union as a politicized logic, even partisan. I believe that this idea that 'being a trade unionist is being a communist', or 'being a radical leftist', still influences people a lot". According to Maria, unions are seen as "fundamentalist, intransigent and inflexible", and Gertrudes further elaborates on this narrative by saying: "unions are not aligned with the principles of today's world... in a post-revolution period (1974-), there were extreme positions and unionism had to play a tough role. But it seems to me that unions did not evolve from that period. I don't see anything else on the part of unionism... a real contribution ...(syndicates) always stay in the position of attack and in the position of asking ... the unions are not defending the workers, they are defending an ideology that has passed". According to the participants, the prevailing discourses towards worker representation depict an idea of an old backwards worker representation, that is "not aligned with the principles of today's world", and that serves no "real contribution", besides defending their own extremist ideologies. Interestingly, Rui's observation sheds light on how a critical view could explain this generalized pejorative look on worker representatives: "The unions were created to defend the workers, the unions should be seen as a positive thing, but in Portugal it is seen as a negative thing. What unions promote always implies more investment in the worker and that is why it always generates controversy, because the focus is not on the worker, it is on the company's profit. So, "power" looks at the unions sideways because the unions want to protect the workers' rights... the boss often doesn't want that because it will deprive him of financial benefits". The discourses that emerge around this topic do not grant any legitimacy or utility to syndicates. A common thread throughout the interviews was the widespread disqualification and discredit in worker unions/syndicates. Participants depict them as too ideological, extremist, fundamentalist,

intransigent, inflexible, backwards, out of touch with reality, useless, self-interested, and broadly delegitimized. After reviewing the main discourses portrayed by the participants around the Portuguese work culture, in the next section I will try to answer the second part of the research question: how do these discourses relate to low job satisfaction?

#### *5.6. How discourses relate to job satisfaction*

In this last section, after having gathered all the discourses, according to the research question, I will explore how they might relate to job satisfaction. In sum, first, there was a consensus between all the interviewees that job satisfaction is a factor of the utmost importance to organizations, which sets the frame for the other discourses. Then, I found discourses of a derogatory, marginalizing, and condescending stance towards employees. Next, I uncovered a generalized discourse of inept leaders, of their prepotent authoritarian leadership practices, their unwillingness to create worker engagement and their suppression of possibilities of more participative leadership stances. The participants also discussed a series of discourses related to the work culture: they discussed the country's recent history of dictatorship still bearing influence in the organization expressed in the form of accepted oppression; they described a highly stratified society where status and influence are crucial, and where workers are excluded; they talked about narratives of conformity and fear of reprisal; and they conveyed a generalized adverse relationship with work; along with a widespread pejorative idea towards worker representatives.

The participants talk in a way that indicates a consensus that job satisfaction is a vital factor for organizations, and all their comments stem from this premise. However, despite the widespread understanding of the importance of employee's well-being, there are a series of other discourses that (re)create an organizational environment that allows for this reality of low job satisfaction. This contradiction is normalized and thus this problem is not given the emphasis it deserves. Although



the participants showed a high level of understanding of this problem of low job satisfaction in the various comments they made throughout the interviews, I would claim that there was a mismatch between how important the participants said it was, and how concerned they were about it. There was a generalized lack of sense of urgency or deep concern over the issue. They all believed job satisfaction to be of the highest importance to an organization, there was a lack of resolve in their overall speech that did not match the importance they ascribed to the problem. If job satisfaction is to be ameliorated, there needs to be an enhancement in the sense of urgency around this problem, otherwise it will continue to be looked at as an unavoidable reality. This reflection is relevant for this study as it unveils a generalized fatalism within the culture that enables the perpetuation of the problem. A critical look would point out that any eventual change to the way things are done would also impact their own self-interests. A different approach to the problem would perhaps require a revolution of power structures which would also potentially affect everyone's positions, everyone's privileges, and disturb the acceptance of the systemic discourses that legitimize and grant these privileges. Foucault (1980) also predicted that, due to their systemic nature, discourses become so normalized that actors will not be aware of the power dynamics that rule them.

The participants also raised discourses of employees being negatively portrayed and this creates a problematic relation which is not conducive to worker engagement and satisfaction at work. If workers are seen as clueless, lazy, unworthy, incapable, etc., they will hardly be satisfied at work. Work has implications in the construction of their identities, and if this is what is expected of them, this is how they will respond. If discourse happens in practice, the way they are talked about is also the way they are treated. If job satisfaction is at the top of organizational priorities, why are discourses not being built towards the empowerment of workers, but to their condemnation? These realities do not align, there is an incongruence. These narratives around workers are potentially normalizing the notion that employees are not worthy of good working

conditions, and this allows for their mistreatment. A critical view would argue that those that gain from the spread of this discourse are those in power who want to maintain the status quo of absolute power that the participants expose, even though this will also harm organizations, and that might involve legitimizing the exploitation of the employees.

On the third main discursive formation, the participants portray leaders as incompetent, overall unfit to lead. I argue that this is at the core of this problem of low job satisfaction and consequent low productivity as some of the participants assert. The leaders' incompetence expressed across the interviewees is demonstrated in the discourses around leaders' incapacity/unwillingness to engage workers and to communicate with them. In addition, the lack of vertical communication is at the same time allowing for the unchallenged autocratic leadership that the interviewees uncover. Furthermore, according to Gertrudes, whose experience counts with decades of experience in leadership training, leaders are usually unwilling to take on training which is arguably allowed by a strong power-knowledge construct – since they are at the top of the chain, they get to decide what is important to know and what is not, while at the same time they feed a culture of ignorance which additionally protects their advantageous positions. If leaders are not competent nor interested in improving, this concerns their capacity to do their job, which is the good management of employees, and this includes an investment in the engagement and well-being of their teams. As a result, workers' satisfaction is affected.

In addition, the participants depicted scenario of an utterly authoritarian leadership culture where the bosses have absolute power to take any decisions unilaterally, without having to concede any explanations, simply because they are “in charge”, and this is accepted as normal. This reality is most evident in the bold statements advanced by the participants such as: “slavery”, “mere authoritarianism”, “manorial power”, and “absolute, feudal power over the workers”. Additionally, participants reveal that leaders will generally crush any chance of opening to participative

leadership models, and that not only do they fail to engage workers, but that they actively suppress their participation and engagement. As Rui affirms, participatory leadership is crushed exactly because it “leads to the loss of absolute power”.

Everyone seems to understand that this widespread autocratic leadership approach is governing organizations, and that it is harmful, yet no one seems to be doing anything about it. As we have seen, an authoritative style of leadership is less effective than a more participatory one (Lewin et al., 1939) and does not lead to job satisfaction. In the same way as with discourses of workers, if leaders are portrayed as incompetent and unwilling to improve; if they practice an authoritarian leadership, and resist to adapt to more participatory practices; if they fail to engage and include workers; if they suppress participation and stifle communication; all these discourses reflect but also enable the (re)production of low job satisfaction, and does not allow for an environment where workers are eager to contribute to the goals of the organization, on the contrary.

In discourse analysis, we pay attention to the whole context, social or otherwise, that can have implications on the problem at hand. And in fact, the socio-historical context often emerged in the participants speech. In the way the participants talk about work culture, we learn about a widespread segregation in the workplace coupled with a culture of unquestionable authority; a culture of cronyism and nepotism; and uttered discourses of fear and conformism. Finally, the participants talked about how work is seen as some sort of punishment which brings no personal fulfilment and that only serves “to pay bills”; and about worker representation as never well seen, extremist, useless and detached from reality. I argue that these are all determining factors that continuously (re)create the work culture and can help explain this reality of low job satisfaction.

Concerning the culture of unquestionable authoritarianism, workers are unlikely to be satisfied if they are not included in the organizational processes; if they are just cogs in a machine where they do not see themselves reflected. There is an increasing necessity of alignment between

the personal goals of the employees and the goals of the organization, and this authoritarian approach is the antithesis of the values that govern our society. How can individuals feel aligned with the goals of the organization, if the organization is managed in a way that is completely averse to the values that they have learned to cherish as the highest values of society: those of justice, fairness, merit, solidarity and democracy?

In the same way, the rampant segregation that the participants talk about needs to be addressed if organizations want to improve worker satisfaction. How can organizations have an environment that leads to job satisfaction if there is a “bipolarization of society”, and if there is “segregation among the workers themselves”, as affirmed by Antonio? How can the workforce contribute with their best efforts if they know that the benefits will invariably benefit only a small group? How can employees take the organization’s problems as their own if they feel that they are not part of it, if they are excluded from the decisions that affect their daily lives? How can employees get involved when they know that ultimately, they live in a culture of nepotism and that what matters are things unrelated to work. such as their family background or social status? These discourses of segregation also show how these power imbalances and abuses in the organization are able to persist. Like in a caste system, the workers are treated unfairly and find themselves in dire conditions, yet, however, they will not resist because any attempt to challenge that reality is received with harsh resistance, and this reality seems to be widely accepted by all. This segregation does not contribute to a satisfying organizational reality, and the contrast only deepens as other societies evolve into more participatory approaches to organization. Irrespectively of how workers are portrayed to be oblivious to these dynamics, they do see the blatant contradiction between the democratic, fair society that they are expected to bring forward, and the reality that they live in at their workplaces. A reality where a naturalized segregation allows for some to be doing well, while most are doing very poorly. The low job satisfaction levels are a reflection of their indignation.

Furthermore, concerning the discourses of fear and conformism, participants openly talked about fear among workers, fear of reprisal, fear of becoming unemployed. This has severe implications when it comes to workers' satisfaction as repressed, fearful employees will hardly be satisfied. The participants convey a discursive reality where workers reluctantly accept the imposed conditions, and this ultimately results in precarious conformity and complacency at the workplace. Seemingly, this generates a discourse of "humbleness" and acceptance of the "whip" because workers are "replaceable" and there is "always" someone that will do the work and accept the conditions if they do not. This narrative allows for abuses on the behalf of employers, which leads to a lack of involvement on the behalf of these disenfranchised employees. The result is a race to the bottom which I argue is a contributing factor to low job satisfaction. Plus, because these discourses become institutionalized, actors might not be aware of these discourses, and workers end up imposing these fears on each other. This generalized conformism maintains the situation as it is, for the desperation of the workforce, who sees no chance of improvement. My analysis concludes that these discourses of conformity, where people are taught not to "make waves", are likely contributing to the low job satisfaction levels. Even though the majority is not happy, and despite the unsustainability of the situation, no one is willing to risk being the one standing out and jeopardizing their (precarious but safe) position. This results in added obstacles to bring about change, and the consequent subsistence of the problem.

Concerning how the relationship with work is portrayed, I argue that in here lies another contributing factor to low job satisfaction. The discourses portray a culture that is averse to work, for understandable reasons: work seems to be but a means to get money and status, which most cannot achieve anyways, instead of representing one's life contribution to solving problems and creating a better society. If work brings no fulfilment, if it is seen as a punishment one must go through to survive, this does not create a favorable environment for a satisfying workplace. As Ana

states, whereas other cultures see work as a path to salvation, in the Portuguese culture one could buy their salvation by paying indulgences to the church. This idea that money is all one needs further reinforces the despair towards work. This discourse persists at the same time that workers see how it is affluence, not merit, that leads to the best opportunities, and they do not believe that they can reach their goals through work. These discourses of work have important implications for low job satisfaction: if work is looked upon in these ways, the chances that people will be satisfied at work are very grim. The participants uncover a reality that is rarely touched upon when discussing these matters, but which is of great importance as workers are increasingly starting to look for fulfilment in their work lives. As our societies evolve, there must be a serious investment in this discussion about the meanings of work.

Finally, when it comes to the discourses surrounding worker representation, I argue that these pejorative views on worker representation within the culture are likely contributing to the low levels of job satisfaction. If worker representation is delegitimized, there is hardly any hope left for workers to voice their concerns and improve their conditions. I emphasize the question once again: who benefits from this narrative? I would argue that this narrative serves the interests of the employers, who logically exult at the idea of delegitimizing one of the main resistances to their absolute power over workers – unions. This discourse against worker representation is yet another reflection of a deeply ingrained power-knowledge construct – even though worker representation is in the interest of workers (the majority), the popular discourse is one where unions are seen as bad actors. The way worker representation is being depicted illustrates the capacity of the most powerful ones to influence discourses, as the main resistance to their absolute power over workers is marginalized and delegitimized in the discourses that populate common speech, even though the great majority of the people are directly affected by the realities these discourses reflect and (re)create.

### 5.7. Summary of findings

The findings of this analysis conclude that the low levels of job satisfaction can be at least partly attributed to the organizational (discursive) environment that workers find themselves in. If the culture promotes nepotism and social segregation; if it normalizes authoritarianism; if it promotes narratives of fear and conformity towards a normalized oppression; if it portrays work as a necessary evil; and endorses a pejorative view of workers and worker representation; unsurprisingly, these discursive realities are not conducive to satisfied workers. In sum, the discourses around workers, leaders and work, perpetuate an overall discourse of organization that seems to only serve the interests of the leaders, which is to secure a status quo, and that does not contemplate workers' interests.

Moreover, my analysis unveils an organizational reality where workers have no agency whatsoever, and where they are kept aside in the decision making. This leads to a reality where workers are detached from their roles and conformed to bare minimums. I found a condescending attitude that allows for this reality, even justifies it; workers feel the system is fundamentally unfair, and that they do not get anything from excelling, quite the opposite: attempts to contribute with ideas and to change anything are vehemently squashed. Additionally, workers see the elite, with the status and money that they seek, not having to perform and even unwilling to evolve. All of this enables the perpetuation of this stratification and *othering*, as everyone looks up to power and the ones that are able to get inside the inner group, get there precisely to exert the power they pursued, and, naturally, exert that power over others.

## 6. Discussion

The research question of this paper was what Discourses do leaders articulate around Portuguese work culture and how do these discourses relate to low job satisfaction? In the previous section, I have covered the discourses articulated by leaders and how they might relate to the low job satisfaction the Portuguese organizations experience. There seems to be deep cultural traits that contribute to this low job satisfaction phenomena that EuroStat's study (2022) exposes, and the discourses uttered by the participants reveal a series of discursive formations that can advance understandings into the causes of low job satisfaction. First, I argue that while all the leaders express the notion that job satisfaction is important, other discourses, such as the ways they talk about workers, other leaders, and the culture, are preventing job satisfaction from being improved in the workplace. Foucault explains how this process develops: as people come to know workers, leaders and work in certain ways, this limits other possibilities to be considered (Foucault, 2002). My analysis thus reveals that the discourses around workers, leaders and culture, are not contributing to the creation and maintenance of a satisfying workplace, and that they not only reflect, but continuously (re)create an organizational reality that leads to poor efficiency, lack of engagement and low job satisfaction.

Additionally, the critical analysis uncovers a reality where management has failed to adapt to a participative way of getting more from their workers, where an oppressive, dictatorial approach is actively undermining the success of organizations, and the low levels of job satisfaction are precisely reflecting that. These power forces generate discourses that sediment a relationship with employees in a way that limits agency and thus maintains poor job satisfaction. This construction of organization is retrograde when compared to other European cultures that have already advanced into new approaches to HRM. To improve job satisfaction, thus we need to change the ways leaders talk and act on employees, on leadership and work culture, and promote more participatory



leadership practices. In the following paragraphs I discuss the contributions of the findings in connection to the literature on HRM, organization studies, and power and communication.

The way employees are treated and given agency has a significant impact on their relationship to work, to how they engage with the organization. As Gould-Williams (2004) argued, it is essential for high-commitment that workers should have the opportunity to express their grievances openly and independently, in addition to being able to contribute to management decision making on task-related issues. In this analysis, I show how difficult it is for employees to voice their concerns or to get involved as they are kept in the dark and as they are actively repressed. Additionally, the fact that employees are somewhat blamed for this situation, in a way justifies the exploitation and removes the blame from those in power. The discourse is perversely turned into one where they deserve the situation they find themselves in. These narratives benefit those in power in the sense that it protects their positions from being challenged, it deflects their blame in the issue and the necessity to improve workers' conditions because the institutionalized discourse (knowledge) assumes that workers are somewhat to blame for this reality.

If we agree that leadership is one of the determining factors of job satisfaction, one of this study's main contributions is to have critically analyzed the discourse of leaders on job satisfaction (arguably one of leadership's main concerns). It made sense to analyze how the more influential ones were perpetuating certain organizational realities in communication as power is a precursor to knowledge, and certain privileged groups have more influence in the co-construction of discourses (Foucault, 1980), Various studies have concluded that job satisfaction is closely related to leadership styles (Belias & Koustelios, 2014; Chang & Lee, 2007), and the same idea is expressed on the participants' affirmations. In this analysis, leaders were portrayed to be incompetent, unfit to lead, and not interested in becoming better leaders, because apparently competence is not their objective. Their unwillingness to improve is maintained by an engrained power-knowledge

construct (Foucault, 1980) that can be explained in two prisms: they get to decide what is important to know and what is not; and they encourage a culture of unwillingness to learn which further secures their power. The problem is that this causes great harm to employees and consequently, to organizations.

Leaders in this culture have failed so far to adapt to more participative approaches and low job satisfaction is a result of that. The findings are in line with the literature, and I conclude that the low job satisfaction levels are at least partly explained by the leadership's incapacity to adapt to a more humane, less mechanistic view to HR. In the recent past, this approach led to negative effects on the health and wellbeing of workers, and the detrimental consequences on societies (Baptiste, 2008). Other countries have learned the lesson, the economies/organizations that embraced more worker-centered cultures are reaping the benefits of such an approach and are already developing at a much higher pace. We see that this the Portuguese work culture has failed so far to adapt to the emergence of "consent-based processes at the point of production" (Mumby, 2015), and its practices seemingly still rely on the forceful control of employees as in early management theory (Baptiste, 2008). The country's leadership has failed so far to adjust the power dynamics like their European counterparts did, which might explain its low job satisfaction levels when compared to other European countries. Deetz (1992) warns that as long as strategic actions foster one-sided goals "all stakeholders in the corporation finally lose" (p. 329). The pertinence of this study is in showing us the practices to avoid. Organizations must avoid this Tayloristic way of giving managers a monopoly over work knowledge, and the placing of workers solely as executors of work (Mumby, 2015).

This study illustrates the usefulness of the constitutive role of communication in organizations approach. This study is of interest to scholars of communication and CCO, as it illustrates how apparently minor utterances can significantly affect and provide insights into work

culture. This becomes increasingly relevant as the constitutive role of communication is becoming more pervasive and integral to the development of organizational control mechanisms, in the context of neoliberal, post-Fordist labor arrangements (Mumby & Stohl, 1991). The modern organization must understand, take into consideration, and apply in its strategy the constitutive role of communication in organization. This study is a good example of the relevance of this framework and illustrates how people become agents by how they communicate in the organization, how their (discursive) practices become the organization. As observed by Heritage (1984), the findings of this paper illustrate how conversations do not merely represent the individual's internal state, but rather a (systemic) co-creation of meaning that controls and coordinates (organizational) activity. As posed by Rorty (1967) and others: language thus becomes a basic ontological condition, it does not merely reflect, but it is actively involved in the production of social reality. If discourse is a vehicle for achieving organizational goals in organizational sense-making processes (Watson, 1995), we must become aware of these processes and transform them to create the desired organizational realities.

This study contributes to the CDA's intent of understanding, exposing and ultimately resisting social inequality (van Dijk, 2001), as it exposes power imbalances that are repeated (in practice) in every day's discourse. This study shows the usefulness of discourse analysis and its expediency in revealing discourses that are hidden and naturalized as common sense. Despite being detached from presumptions of objectivity, a critical discourse analyst makes positions and interests explicit through the process of reflexivity (Wodak & Meyer, 2016), and this is the contribution I aim to bring in this study. This included a constant reminder of the ways we all are complicit in systems of oppression, everyone including me and the interviewees. It became clear in the analysis that interviewer and interviewee were deeply impacted in the (re)creation of the institutional power dynamics and relations which I was looking to critique. In overall terms, the participants referred to

the same limitations and drew a picture of a stratified society where the authoritarian way in which organizations are ruled is in all likelihood related to the low job satisfaction levels the country exhibits. These dominant institutionalized ways of speaking shape our behaviors beyond what one is conscient about and critical discourse analysis makes us aware of these forces in action.

This study adds to the literature a view of the worker as a citizen, as an integral part of the whole; and a view of leaders as reflexive individuals who are able to sit down and reflect about their management of organizations. If we want to improve organizations, then we must see people for what they are, equals, we should not avoid debate. Understanding how communication is a crucial component in the creation and replication of value in capitalism becomes necessary for the realization of this vision of freedom and democracy. We are taught to identify ourselves in certain ways and this study reflects that our perception of 'who we are' comes from our intersection in networks of historically contingent meanings conveyed by institutionalized patterns of doing, thinking and speaking (Tenorio, 2011). Furthermore, in this study I attempt to highlight how communication and the transmission of values serves as a fundamental building block for the development of our professional identities at work. The same is true for the creation of our identities as citizens.

As to power, as we see in the collection of quotes gathered, and along with Taylor's point (2009), every act of communication presupposes the development of authority relationships. It is through the complicated connection of power and discourse that the formation of identities is shaped (Hardy & Phillips, 2004; Kuhn, 2008). Therefore, the fact that the identities of organization' members are shaped by power is a ubiquitous aspect of organizational life. There is indeed a system of presence and absence that consistently prioritizes or marginalizes the various organizational experiences as organized social practices (Mumby, 2015), and this study aims to raise this discussion. Studies have neglected this ubiquity of power dynamics in organizational life, and as

Mumby (2015) wrote: we must open this discourse and “directly address the problem of human relations in an authoritarian setting” (p. 20).

This study allows us to observe that discursive battle between various interest groups who try to establish meaning that leads some worldviews to be more valued than others, and Mumby is in line with Foucault when he says that the dominant group is most equipped to advance its own objectives and ideological meaning structures (Mumby & Stohl 1991; Foucault 1972). A Foucauldian critical analysis allows for a heightened perception and understanding of who has a voice and who does not, and why that might be the case (Jäger & Maier, 2009, p. 116). This study highlights the relevance of critical analysis in the fields of organization and management studies.

In line with Foucauldian thought, this study shows discourse as practice. Foucault shows us how discourses are ideologic expressions that create individual and societal awareness, which in turn affects people's behavior. This study is a fair example of those dynamics. As in Foucault's thought, discourse is not only about the individual act, but it is about speaking or doing something systematically (Foucault, 1979). The findings of this study point to this concept as there is an implicit connection between the discourses of the various participants. It was interesting to see how discourses are indeed systematically institutionalized, how we kept seeing the same narratives being played, how some 'knowledge' was fairly common to all interviewees. This serves to demonstrate how pertinent a socio-constructivist view is, and the usefulness of critical discourse analysis. Discourse is institutionalized, participants were not simply answering the questions based on how they felt and thought, instead their words and decisions were constantly governed by ubiquitous systemic practices (Jäger & Maier, 2009, p. 111). This study demonstrates how people indeed behave in response to wider discourses, and shows how they react either with acceptance, opposition or compromise (Doolin, 2002).

The Foucauldian view this study brings about can contribute to the debate by demonstrating how particular behavioral and linguistic activities are given preferential treatment by legitimate authority and result in a subtle kind of social control (Barker, 1993; Brown & Coupland, 2005). Foucault also predicted that these discourses that allow for and perpetuate these power relations become normalized and participants may not even be aware of these dynamics. As seen in the analysis, even though the participants were conscious of the harsh work reality, no one asked for immediate action, or an alternative to syndicates, or better education for our workers and leaders, better education in the ways we communicate and act towards our work culture, or education towards an informed class consciousness. It is as if some dialogues are purposefully kept out of the discussion. As Foucault theorizes (2002), after being formed, discourses then serve to limit certain other narratives and this is evident in the discourses of secrecy and flawed communication that emerged in the interviews where there is an covert but clear intent of silencing certain dialogues and viewpoints. From a Foucauldian perspective, language thus serves as a tool for social control and power and that becomes clear in this study. This leads us to both ontological and epistemological considerations, since the discourses that make the (discursive) object, are also the discourses that contain the knowledge and practices that we need to understand it and improve our practices (Foucault, 1980).

## **7. Conclusion**

In the modern world of increasing competitiveness, organizations strive to incorporate all strategic advantages. Having a thriving workforce is one of them and the old managerial autocratic systems are giving way to more participatory approaches where the capital-labor relationship has a

cooperative focus in which management techniques seek to maximize the potential of both workers and organizations for the good of all (Sennet, 2006). However, not all cultures have adapted to this new approach in the same way, and Portugal seems to be an example of a country that has failed so far to apply these principles in the way its organizations are ran.

Embracing a social constructivist approach that considers the constitutive role of communication in organizational reality, this study ran interviews to Portuguese leaders in an attempt to uncover the discursive practices that could explain the country's low job satisfaction levels, and how they related to leadership practices in communication. This study thus aimed to answer the following question: 'what discourses do leaders articulate around the Portuguese work culture and how do these discourses relate to low job satisfaction?'

The participants uncovered deep cultural traits that contribute to low job satisfaction and the findings of my analysis conclude that the (discursive) environment that workers find themselves in offers explanations as to the disenchantment of such a big portion of the workforce. While the participants expressed that job satisfaction should be at the top of organization's concerns, other discourses, such as the ways they talked about workers, other leaders, and the work culture, seem to be contributing to this problem of low job satisfaction. The discourses that emerged exposed a pejorative look on workers, leaders and work itself, and I conclude that these discourses lead to an organizational environment of utter frustration for workers. As Foucault theorized, as people come to know themselves (workers/leaders) and work in certain ways, this limits other possibilities to be considered (Foucault, 2002), and the low levels of job satisfaction are indeed a reflection of the ways people communicate. The critical analysis I undertake unveils an organizational reality where workers have no agency and where they are kept aside in the decision making, leading to a reality where workers are detached from their roles and conformed to bare minimums.

The participants also depict a work culture of a normalized authoritarianism in the workplace where nepotism and social segregation are promoted; they portray narratives of fear and conformity towards a normalized oppression. I conclude that, according to the participants and as seen in the literature, job satisfaction is being negatively impacted by the autocratic leadership style seen in most Portuguese organizations

These discursive realities are likely impacting job satisfaction, and to improve it, we need to become aware of the ways we speak. Communication serves not only as a thermometer of reality but also as a way to perpetuate or change the way we run organizations. Thus, I recommend that to enhance job satisfaction, we can start by changing the way we talk and understand employees, leadership and work culture, and we need to promote more participatory leadership practices. The Portuguese leadership should focus on a discursive repositioning of the work culture that puts workers' interest at the center of organizations' priorities. This construction of organization is retrograde when compared to other European cultures that have already advanced into new approaches to HRM, and this can at least partly explain Portugal's low levels of job satisfaction and productivity when compared to their European counterparts.

With this analysis, I hope to have been able to contribute to a better understanding and development of effective leadership approaches that will allow us to improve the organizational culture and consequently the performance of organizations. The promotion of employee wellbeing will lead to a more committed workforce, who is satisfied with their jobs and who will consequently produce better organizations. I remind the reader that even though the focus of this study is job satisfaction, the main issue is the consequences of job satisfaction, the important question is what job satisfaction means to our organizations and institutions. I hope that with this study I was able to raise awareness that the promotion of employee wellbeing and their participation in decision-making has deep implications not only in the success of organizations but of society at large.



My recommendation is that to improve job satisfaction, there needs to be an investment, an awareness, a profound change in the discourses that permeate, reflect and create our organizations. Furthermore, the autocratic leadership style seems to be harming organizations and its members, thus we need to embrace more participatory approaches and develop democratic organizations. Although there is much debate and different approaches to leadership, both academics and practitioners are leaning to the position that a democratic leadership is the best form of management in the modern workplace.

As a critical scholar inspired by Foucault's views on discourse and organizations, in this study, I aim to raise the question of 'who gains from the propagation of these discourses'. These discursive practices do not emerge randomly; therefore we need to question: what might be the motives behind a certain discourse; whose interests do certain discourses favor? Who gains from the normalization of the autocracy at work; from the unwillingness of adapting to a participative leadership; from the segregation among equals; from the ambiguous communication that hinders transparency; from the prejudice towards employees and worker representatives? Seemingly, these are all narratives that subjugate the many and protect the few. These realizations bring the discussion back to the necessity of adopting transparent democratic practices in the workplace, so that all agents have a say in the way these discourses are (dis)continued. This truth is even more resounding when we consider the implications work has on identities, and the fact that modern workers are increasingly concerned with the values embraced by the organizations they work in. Thus we are reminded of the necessity of aligning the organizational goals with the goals of the individuals that constitute the organization. Today, when corporations are so powerful and affect so much of our lives, this separation between the values that rule our political lives and the ones that rule our work lives can no longer be sustained, at the risk of great peril to the societies of the future. We are reminded by Wilcocks (2004) of the Foucauldian notion that organizations are entrenched in

social and political contexts, and as we know, modern corporate organizations control everything from the construction of the individual's identity to the use of natural resources, to the definitions of values and the distribution of goods and services. The modern organization is replacing the State in the basilar sites of society where many of the decisions of our collective well-being are made, yet they lack the foundations of democratic systems. The choices that modern organizations take have the potential to affect the circumstances of entire nations, and the increasing competition between economies and the fast evolution of technology will pressure nations make decisions that are potentially detrimental to whole societies. This demands an urgent and proper organizational response, and this response should be informed by democratic processes.

Work should be a space of growth, of fulfillment and contribution to society. Failing to turn work into a vibrant reality for everyone and adapting to more participative practices is negating the best system we found so far to rule ourselves – democracy. The workplace, out of all the places in society, is one of the most important places to apply and nurture democratic values. We need to protect our societies from the apparently colossal contradiction there is between the values of individual freedom and democracy, and the oppressive character of the authoritative workplace. That change not only has the capacity to improve organizations, but it is vital for our societies. We must develop new discourses of work and shift the focus of authority in the workplace from rules, structures and technology to humans themselves, the workers, the citizens. In that we will see the greatest developments ever. Given the preliminary nature of this study, further research needs to be conducted on the leading causes of low job satisfaction, by, for instance, engaging in qualitative analysis of employees' discourses about job satisfaction. This study ran interviews to Portuguese leaders to uncover the discursive patterns that (re)produce the sustained low job satisfaction levels the country exhibits.

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