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**HOW DO DIVERSE INDIVIDUALS EXPERIENCE ETHICAL
DILEMMAS IN THE WORKPLACE IN THE CONTEXT OF HUMAN
SECURITY? AN INTERPRETIVE RESEARCH WITH EMPLOYEES
FROM TWO FIRMS IN BRAZIL**

A Research Paper by:

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Disclaimer:

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List of Acronyms

ILO – International Labour Organization

NGO – Non-Governmental Organization

NPM – New Public Management

UDHR - Universal Declaration of Human Rights

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

UN – United Nations

Working title

How do diverse individuals experience ethical dilemmas in the workplace in the context of human security? An interpretive research with employees from two firms in Brazil.

Keywords

Human security, Dignity, Work, Competing demands, Toxic workplaces, Toxic work environments, Ethical dilemmas, Affects, Practices

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Abstract

The modern concept of human security refers to the protection of individuals and communities from daily threats to their dignity. At the same time, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) establishes that everyone has the right to *just and favourable conditions of work* but fails to determine what does this mean in practice for the employees. Taking into account current reports about unhappiness at work, this research hypothesised that many threats to employees' dignity might have come from unfavourable, perhaps toxic, workplace conditions. Using interpretive research methodology and examining employees from two firms in Brazil, this research paper found that it is common for individuals to experience ethical dilemmas in their workplaces, particularly when the organization does not protect them or prioritises profits and other performance indicators over well-being of employees. The lack of institutional protection may contribute to the persistence of misbehaviour that threatens the employee dignity, hence jeopardizing human security. Another important finding is that different individuals can experience ethical dilemmas differently, through diverse feelings, rationalizations and practices. While the results are not meant to be generalized, from here one could infer that in order to increase human security, improving the conditions at work, according to the employees themselves, could be one alternative. Additionally, extending the social safety net and granting a decent income for unemployed people would make them less vulnerable to toxic workplaces.

Relevance to Development Studies

Identifying the sources of human insecurity is a fundamental step to address threats to human dignity. Nevertheless, we are witnessing unprecedented levels of perceived human insecurity, where, according to the UNDP, more than six in seven people worldwide feel moderately or very insecure. In the context of employment, the lack of human security is a toxic trait in the literal meaning of the word, it poisons human well-being and will have negative health and life satisfaction impact on individuals. If work conditions are specific but perceived human insecurity is widespread, having studied them under specific circumstances can help to set actions to reduce human insecurity and, as a result, increase employee engagement and happiness at work also in other contexts.

1.0 Introduction

The right to work and the conditions associated with it are essential for promoting human dignity. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) acknowledges that work is an essential aspect of human life and states that a “just and favourable remuneration” can enable “an existence worthy of human dignity” (UDHR, 2021, p.6). But it is not only the absence of work or remuneration that can threaten one’s dignity: the conditions of the work also matter. The UDHR discerns that when it establishes that “everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, *to just and favourable conditions of work* and to protection against unemployment” (*Ibid.*, p.6, *emphasis added*). Decent work, reasonable working hours and rest are also components of the declaration that underline the intrinsic relationship between work and human dignity. But what does dignity mean?

Dignity is the inherent worth and value of every person, and a fundamental aspect of human rights. In a special report from 2022 entitled *New threats to human security in the Anthropocene: demanding greater solidarity*, The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) cited Martha Nussbaum to explain that “dignity is related to respect, agency and equality. So, dignity consists of being treated with respect. It also implies having control over what people are able to do. And it implies respecting the principle that all human beings are all equal” (Nussbaum, 2011, cited in UNDP, 2022, p.93). The report emphasizes that any threat to dignity such as injustice, oppression and discrimination is interconnected to the human security concept (*Ibid.*).

In itself, human security refers to the protection of individuals and communities from various threats and vulnerabilities, ensuring their survival, livelihood, and dignity. One of previous Human Development Reports, from 1994, already identified that “for most people, a feeling of insecurity arises more from worries about daily life than from the dread of a cataclysmic world event. Will they and their families have enough to eat? Will they lose their jobs?” (UNDP, 1994, p.22).

When it comes to human security in the context of employment, the role of the private sector cannot be neglected. As recently observed by the International Labour Organization (ILO), “in most countries, private enterprises create the most jobs. This is especially true in developing countries, where over 90 per cent of jobs are in the private sector” (ILO, 2023, p.1). Thus, investigating the conditions of work in the private sector, particularly in developing countries, is crucial for upholding human dignity. This endeavour, however, is anticipated to

be challenging since the UDHR has noticeable shortcomings. What makes work *decent*? Who defines what is and what is not *decent* work? What do we consider *reasonable working hours*? How much rest should *decent* work provide? In summary, what do *just and favourable conditions of work* mean in practice? Examining the perspectives of employees, frequently marginalized by their employers, can bring to light concealed challenges to workplace dignity through narratives of lived experiences of such marginalization.

In 2003, while revising and expanding the concept of human security, the United Nations (UN) Commission on Human Security recognized that “what people consider to be ‘vital’—what they consider to be ‘of the essence of life’ and ‘crucially important’—varies across individuals and societies” (UNDP, 2022, p.35). This implies that employees’ responses, even if acknowledged, are likely to exhibit variability and they are not meant to be definitive nor exclusive. But a degree of subjectivity should not be used as an excuse to discredit such investigation: “using human security lens implies considering people’s views. What constitutes fear, want and dignity depends largely on people’s beliefs, which are formulated based on a combination of very specific and objective factors, along with elements that may be more subjective” (UNDP, 2022, p.15). Gómez and Gasper (2022) reinforced this subjectivity when they affirmed that “human security thinking starts from our existing life-situation, what threatens us, objectively and *subjectively*. It connects to feelings, and reflects the realities of wherever people are now (...)” (p.39, *emphasis added*). This emphasis on subjectivity and feelings fit the increasing attention paid to the affective elements in understanding human security as well as broader social relationships in the development policy context – the trend some called “the affective turn” (Durnová, 2015; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012; Stone, 2013).

We are witnessing unprecedented levels of perceived human insecurity, where, according to the UNDP, more than six in seven people worldwide feel moderately or very insecure (2022, p.4). At the same time, “protecting people from critical (severe) and pervasive (widespread) threats and situations” is part of what defines human security (*Ibid.*, p.35). Identifying the sources of human insecurity is a fundamental step to address threats to human dignity. If the severity of the matter asks for urgency, the pervasiveness of the human insecurity demands focus. The lack of clarity on what *just and favourable conditions of work* (UDHR, 2021, p.6) mean suggests that examining workplaces and conditions of work can be enlightening.

The following research will unfold in accordance with the outlined structure. The initial chapter will offer an introduction to the overarching issue, elucidating its inherent nature and underscoring its significance to development studies. Following, the second chapter will

expand the main research question and its sub-questions. The third chapter will provide a brief background for this study and point out gaps found as a result of the literature review. The fourth chapter will present the theoretical framework, which encompasses human security and concepts such as affects and practices. Chapter five will present the research design and methods, including study limitations, positionality and ethical challenges faced in conducting this research. The sixth chapter will be dedicated to present data findings and the penultimate, to discuss them. Finally, the last chapter will conclude and suggest future research.

1.1 Nature of The Problem

“Threats to one’s dignity emanate not only from objective deprivations (such as not having basic needs met, linking to the aspiration of being free from want) but also from stigma. Sometimes, the very interventions that seek to address material deprivations may hurt people’s dignity by stigmatizing them and inducing emotions of shame (...)” (UNDP, 2022, p.15).

In the same way that work is crucial for dignity, work environments can threaten it. On the one hand, the relatively stable source of income provided by a job can help reduce socio-economic insecurities and avoid deprivations such as “hunger, having no money, not being able to afford medicines” (UNDP, 2022, p.38). On the other hand, a variety of behaviors and situations can create a hostile or harmful work environment that reduces human security. Such threatening work environments will be referred to in this research paper as *toxic workplaces* or *toxic work environments*. Toxicity here is used to emphasised the lack of the minimal levels of human security, unfavourable conditions under which stress, lack of meaning and alienation from work takes place, with adverse impact on physical and mental health of employees (Maté and Maté, 2022).

Gabor Maté, a renowned medical doctor and best-selling author of books on trauma, addiction and well-being, writing with his son Daniel Maté, provided a helpful analogy that justifies the choice of the word “*toxic*”. They elaborate: “in a laboratory, a culture is a biochemical broth custom-made to promote the development of this or that organism (...) a suitable and well-maintained culture should allow for their happy, healthy grow and proliferation. If the same organisms begin showing pathologies at unprecedented rates, or fail to thrive (...) we could rightly call this a *toxic culture* – unsuitable for the creatures it is meant to support” (Maté and Maté, 2022, p.4, original emphasis). The high level of perceived human

insecurity globally suggests that many of us are embedded in toxic cultures, and possibly toxic work environments.

Toxic work environments and the concept of human security are closely related, as toxic workplaces can significantly undermine various dimensions of human security. A combination of concepts from the UNDP (2022) and Gasper (2022) help define the relationship between human security and toxic workplaces better, which is crucial for shaping the research design in this research paper. Gasper discusses '*freedom from want*', '*freedom from fear*' and '*freedom to live in dignity*', for which the best definitions are found by reviewing the 2022 report from the UNDP:

Freedom from want: Human security emphasizes protection from economic deprivation and ensuring livelihoods (UNDP, 2022, p.16). Toxic work environments, which may involve favoritism, unfair treatment, or lack of job security, can threaten employees' livelihoods and job stability.

Freedom from fear: Human security includes freedom from fear (such as fear of retaliation) and the freedom to take action to improve one's situation (*Ibid.*). Toxic work environments, where reporting issues may lead to reprisals, can strip employees of these freedoms.

Freedom to live in dignity: Human security advocates for protection from social exclusion and the preservation of dignity (*Ibid.*). Employees subjected to toxic behaviors can feel socially excluded and disrespected, undermining their sense of belonging and dignity. Toxic workplaces sometimes demand long hours of work and create a culture where employees feel obligated to be constantly available (Ariza-Montes *et al.*, 2021), contributing to stress and adversely affecting psychological well-being, aspects crucial to human security.

In other words, one could say that the lack of human security is a toxic trait in the literal meaning of the word, it poisons human well-being and will have negative health and life satisfaction impact on individuals. It is derivative from the work of UNDP (2022) and Gasper (2022), that if a workplace fails to secure the *freedom from want*, *freedom from fear* or the *freedom to live in dignity*, it may be considered a toxic work environment since employees' dignity is under threat.

While the relevance of the private sector in job creation in developing countries (ILO, 2023) justifies the focus of this study, toxic work environments are not confined solely to the

private sector; rather, given that private sector practices permeate through all sectors of the economy, toxic workplaces are likely to be found across work environments.

The role of the private sector in development goes beyond job creation. Private companies invest heavily in research and development, leading to technological advancements that can have widespread implications for a country's development, including improvements in healthcare, agriculture, and infrastructure. Research has even shown that the private sector could play a role accelerating the sustainable development goals' (SDGs) implementation process (Rashed and Shah, 2020, p.2931), which includes SDG 8: "Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and *decent work for all*" (UN, n.d., *emphasis added*).

Motivated by profit, private enterprises can achieve greater efficiency and effectiveness in resource utilization, enhancing overall economic efficiency. Scholars have argued that private sector resources can contribute to the promotion of international health goals (including mental health) and thus asked themselves "what can be learnt from the private sector to enhance operations in the public sector?" (Bennett, 1992, p.97).

The idea of borrowing concepts from one sector to reapply them in another is not new. New Public Management (NPM) is a management approach used in government and public service organizations to improve efficiency, accountability, and responsiveness. It emerged in the 1980s and 1990s as a response to the perceived inefficiencies and bureaucratic nature of traditional public administration. It is important to note that while NPM has been influential in shaping public sector reforms in many countries, it has also faced criticism. Critics argue that it can lead to a focus on short-term results, neglecting important social and equity concerns, and may promote a narrow, market-driven view of public services (Levy, 2010; Siltala, 2013). My motivation in discussing NPM is to draw readers' attention to the fact that whatever happens in the private sector may be highly influential also for the public sector, including the dynamics of profit-generation that may de-humanise employees as mere labour whose productivity is the only feature that counts.

In sum, given the relationship between capital and efficiency, work conditions in the private sector are particularly important given the knock-on effect such practices have in other sectors. Private sector employees experience organizational practices that can hamper or enhance their human security. For other sectors, understanding the impact of organizational practices in employees' dignity can be crucial to distinguish which practices should be eventually adopted via NPM and which ones should be avoided.

1.2 Relevance of the research

As stated above, the great majority of people are unhappy with their jobs. Recently, Collins summarized the *State of the Global Workplace: 2023 Report* from Gallup, stating: “along with dissatisfaction, workers are experiencing staggering rates of both disengagement and *unhappiness*. 60% of people reported being emotionally detached at work and 19% as being miserable” (Collins, 2022, *emphasis added*). The report itself reinforces that “employee stress remained at a record-high level” (Gallup, 2023, p.5) and that “globally, over half of employees expressed some level of intent to leave their job” (*Ibid.*, p.7). These data strongly suggest that for most people, conditions of work are far from ideal.

Aiming to understand threats to employees’ wellbeing and using human security lenses, this research explored common ethical dilemmas faced by individuals employed in the private sector, investigated associated affective reactions and lived experiences as well as practices, and interpreted these data in the context of human security. In order to do that, I first acknowledge that competing demands are inherently to organizations (Smith and Tracey, 2016) and argue that these competing demands translate into individual dilemmas experienced by employees. Second, I differentiate ethical dilemmas from non-ethical dilemmas (Nanteuil, 2021) and then connect ethical dilemmas to human security threats. Third, I investigate how different individuals experienced ethical dilemmas, by looking into affects (feelings and rationalizations of these feelings) and practices (actions and inactions with regards to the threats to security). Finally, I discuss about the variation or the lack of variation in the affects and practices.

Although this research paper examined ethical dilemmas that have arisen in specific geographical, cultural and timely contexts, it encompassed fundamental human rights as the *freedom to live in dignity* (UNDP, 2022, p.16; Gasper, 2022, p.2). If work conditions are specific but perceived human insecurity is widespread, having studied them under specific circumstances can help to set actions to reduce human insecurity and, as a result, increase employee engagement and happiness at work also in other contexts.

The major finding of this study is that it is common for individuals to experience ethical dilemmas in their workplaces, particularly when the organization does not protect them or prioritises profits and other performance indicators over well-being of employees. The lack of institutional protection may contribute to the persistence of misbehaviour that threatens the employee dignity, hence jeopardizing human security. It is important to mention that, to the

best of my knowledge and as of the end of 2023, this is one of the very few studies to engage in documenting and interpreting the lived experience of employees who undergo threats to their human security through the lenses of affects, rationalizations and practices. By incorporating the employee's lenses and examining individual responses and real actions and inactions, this study offers a valuable contribution to the body of literature on human security and employee well-being, both in the context of Brazil where the studied individuals live and work, and broader.

2.0 Research Question and sub-questions

General Research Question

Based on the empirical data from the two companies in Brazil, how do diverse individuals experience ethical dilemmas in the workplace in the context of their human security?

Sub Questions:

1. What are the common ethical dilemmas individuals experience in their workplaces?
2. How do different individuals feel, interpret and react to dilemmas in the same work environment?
3. What are the practices of ascertaining human security by individuals under perceived organizational threats?

3.0 Background to the study and literature review

3.1 Human Security

The concept of human security evolved significantly in the last decades. After World War II, it moved away from its original focus on territorial security and protection of national borders towards individual security (UNDP, 2022, p.34). In its modern conception, human security emphasizes the empowerment of people and communities to participate fully in decisions affecting their well-being, ensuring their safety from chronic threats and sudden disruptions (UNDP, 2022).

Under this amplified definition, though, people are feeling more insecure than ever. If the most recent report from the UNDP captured the record-high level of perceived human insecurity (UNDP, 2022, p.4), a previous one had already acknowledged that daily threats, not eventual disruptions, are the main source of insecurity (UNDP, 1994, p.22). As noted by Gasper, human security thinking can be seen as a framework which “includes concepts of: threats to priority values; disasters and crises; (...) associated perceptions and fears; *structural vulnerability* and *structural violence*” (2022, p.2, emphasis added).

The previous implies that most people are feeling insecure because they are threatened on a daily basis and they are exposed to situations or environments in which they feel vulnerable and suffer recurrent violence. Combining these conclusions with reports about unhappiness at work (Gallup, 2023), I hypothesized that work environments could have been playing an important role on this generalized perception of human insecurity.

A study about bullying at work reinforced the link between vulnerability, structural violence and human security: “bullying is a relationship of violence involving practices of *domination* that strip another person of the capacity for agency, using interventions carrying the sustained threat of *harm*” (Sercombe and Donnelly, 2013, p.499, emphasis added). It is plausible to assume that bullying is recurrent in toxic work environments, but there are other forms of domination and harm present in toxic work environments which can affect human security.

For instance, Gasper explained that “when discriminated groups are able to shape decision-making, potential tensions between protection and empowerment strategies diminish” (Gasper, 2022, p.12). Thus, one can assume that in toxic workplaces, discriminated groups and individuals are *not* able to shape decision-making which can impact their well-being. At the same time, the UNDP argued that “protection is provided in a context of participation, deliberation and dialogue.” (2022, p.25). Groups and individuals discriminated against by a toxic work environment or a toxic leader are often voiceless and have a limited participation, or do not participate at all, in dialogue and deliberation.

Individuals who experience discrimination are vulnerable because they have inadequate protection from the organization and because they are disempowered, and suffer systematic violence, sometimes from those who should stand-up for them: their leaders. Who should they trust, if anyone? The UNDP explains the role of trust and its relation with human security:

“Today we confront a context with (...) a strong association between perceptions of lack of human security and low interpersonal trust. It is difficult to establish causality in this relationship, though it probably runs both ways. On the one hand, evidence suggests that when insecurity increases, trust goes down. On the other, low interpersonal trust spills over to low trust in many government institutions and governments themselves, creating conditions under which people may feel less secure.”

(UNDP, 2022, p.29.)

The implication of this is that toxic workplaces, with high human insecurity levels, display low levels of trust. The UNDP distinguishes between generalized and impersonal trust: while the latter could be described as “establishing a default way of interacting with strangers” (2022, p.20), the former can be understood as “the trust placed in others in general and not for a particular reason or interest” (*Ibid.*). The report concludes that “understood in this way, it is clear that social life, in any context, would be very difficult, if not impossible, without impersonal trust” (*Ibid.*).

The lack of trust can obstruct cooperation and solidarity. Oscar Gómez and Des Gasper explain why these concepts are important: “one group can typically only be secure if the groups with whom it is significantly connected are secure too” (2022, p.37). The UNDP elucidates this relation: “the security of one group contributes to the security of other groups as the violation of some groups’ rights today leaves the space for the violation of other groups’ rights tomorrow” (2022, p.108).

In summary, toxic work environments seem to offer a perfect storm of adverse conditions which threaten human security. First, they refrain from providing the adequate protection against discrimination and oppression, making employees vulnerable. Second, toxic work environments strip from individuals their agency, increasing their vulnerability. Third, with the rise of human insecurity, interpersonal trust decreases. Lastly, with low levels of trust, there is less room for collaboration, which compromises solidarity strategies, deemed as crucial for increasing human security.

3.2 Understanding Toxicity

Toxicity in the workplace has been defined as a “pain that strips people of their self esteem and that disconnects them from their work” (Stark, 2003, cited by Appelbaum and Roy-Girard, 2007, p.17). Kusy and Holloway (2009) argue that before talking about a toxic work environment, we should talk about the persona of *toxic people* at the workplace: “an extremely difficult person to deal with in the workplace. Call them what you will: *control freaks, narcissists, manipulators, bullies, poisonous individuals, or humiliators*, to name just a few” (Kusy and Holloway, 2009, p.3, original emphasis). The authors illustrate how harmful toxic people are:

“These difficult individuals have the capacity to pervade our thoughts and sap our energies so much so that they have the potential to undermine our sense of well-being. In a variety of ways, they get under our skin, infiltrate our professional and personal space, demoralize us, demotivate teams, and ultimately can even make us doubt our own competence and productivity. They are toxic in every sense of the term. (...) And sometimes these effects continue even after the toxic person is no longer around. We found many situations where the toxicity lingers in the system after the toxic person leaves voluntarily or is fired.”

(Kusy and Holloway, 2009, p.4.)

But how does toxicity spread from an individual to the bowels of an organization? One possible explanation was provided by Rasool and colleagues: inadequate organizational support. The researchers argue that organizational support mediates the relationship between a toxic workplace environment and employee engagement: “organizational support reflects an organization’s overall expectations of its members and recognizes the personal value of each employee (...) when organizational support is provided to employees, their cognitive and emotional evaluation of their organization is strengthened” (Rasool *et al.*, 2021, p.5). They added that leadership support can mitigate the negative effects of toxic work environments on employee engagement and productivity. (*Ibid.*)

The previous poses an additional challenge: what if the leaders themselves are toxic? Power imbalances are the backbone of organizational designs, since leaders have power over their direct reports and, in some cases, over all organization members. So long as leadership is

associated with power, the combination of leadership and toxicity can be particularly harmful. Kusy and Holloway noted that “toxic personalities are part of a complex system, which is the source of their power” (2009, p.10). Leaders both benefit from and influence organizational support; as a result, toxic leaders can equally benefit from inadequate organizational support, increasing their toxicity level and reducing organizational support in exerting their power. Furthermore, research has shown that “the higher up the toxic person is, (...) the more people there are who behave in the same way” (Appelbaum and Roy-Girard, 2007, p.18).

Besides organizational support, the *bad apple* effect can be used to explain how toxicity spreads across organizations. According to research, one toxic team member can contaminate all the team, negatively impacting performance: “it’s almost as if the emotionally unstable team member infects the rest of the team with negative energy” (Kusy and Holloway, 2009, p.18). The combination of both theories suggest that, when the *bad apple* is a leader, not a team member, the effects can be combined and toxicity may spread faster throughout the organization. Future research could investigate this.

If the effect of one toxic person (or a toxic leader) can deeply harm an employee, the effects of a toxic system can be devastating. Several empirical studies have confirmed that toxic workplace environments reduce employee engagement and employee well-being (see for example: Felicitas Stuber *et al.*, 2019; Pimenta, 2022; Rasool *et al.*, 2021; Wu, Wei and Hui, 2011). Rasool *et al.* add that “it is also noted that the workers’ health is affected by high job demands and work pressures; as a result, effects such as headaches, personality disorders, anxiety disorders, insomnia, burnout, and depression occur.” (2021, p.11). Research by Appelbaum and Roy-Girard indicated that employees working in toxic environments likely suffer “impaired judgment, irritability, anxiety, anger, an inability to concentrate and memory loss” (2007, p.22). Although no significant difference in gender of toxic individuals have been found (Kusy and Holloway, 2009, p.9), research also shows that women are 41% more likely to experience toxic workplace culture than men (Sull and Sull, 2023).

Studies have also confirmed the productivity loss found within toxic workplace environments: “it has been proven that ostracism, incivility, harassment, and bullying have direct significant negative effects on job productivity” (Anjum *et al.*, 2018, p.9). Appelbaum and Roy-Girard estimate that *deviant behaviors*, voluntary behaviors that threaten the well-being of an organization, cost companies in the USA alone \$200 billion each year (2007, p.22).

There are additional implications on organizational performance: during their investigation about toxic workplaces and its effects, Kusy and Holloway pointed out that

“talented people left the organization; marginal performers are the ones who stayed.” (2009, p.19). This means that toxic workplaces negatively impact productivity in four different ways:

1. Directly reducing employee engagement
2. Indirectly reducing employee well-being
3. Contributing to the losing of talent and top performers
4. Stimulating deviant behaviors.

Unfortunately and despite all its negative effects, research indicates that toxicity in organizations is pervasive. Bringing this back to NMP and the pervasiveness of toxicity, Kusy and Holloway have stated that because it has taken so long to do something about toxic workplaces, the issue is so prevalent that they have found no difference in the occurrence of such workplaces between profit and non-profit organizations (2009, p.12). The authors complement by making an important distinction between difficult behavior and toxicity. According to them, it is not only the occurrence of a bad day that makes an individual or an organization toxic, it is repeatedly problematic behavior occurring over years (*Ibid.*, p.9). Their findings suggest that any research which contributes to the understanding of this pervasive and chronic issue, regardless of the specificity of the case study may be helpful to other types of organizations and their members.

Throwing a spanner in the works, Appelbaum and Roy-Girard explain why recognizing toxicity can be challenging: “if the organization is so toxic that no one realizes it, or at least no one with any “power” to change anything, the organization will remain in its toxic state until some toxins (leaders and managers) in power positions are replaced with non-toxic employees” (2007, p.21). This reinforces the importance of hearing the employees themselves since “there is no better judge than the people working under the possible toxic individual” (*Ibid.*, p.22).

The literature review indicates that a lot of attention has been dedicated to understanding the impact of toxic work environments on productivity, employee engagement, employee well-being and individuals’ mental health (Anjum *et al.*, 2018; Appelbaum and Roy-Girard, 2007; Felicitas Stuber *et al.*, 2019; Pimenta, 2022; Rasool *et al.*, 2021; Wu, Wei and Hui, 2011). At some level, they all share the same essence: they confirm the undisputable severity of the issue. While calculating damages is obviously important, preventing them from happening is even more important. For that, it is necessary to investigate what happens *during* the unfolding of events, preferably *before* the toxic behaviors have contaminated the entire organization. What

happens when individuals face toxic leaders? Do they realize that they are exposed to these toxins or do not? If yes, how do they react?

Some researchers have investigated coping mechanisms adopted by individuals who are exposed to toxic leadership (Bhandarker and Rai, 2019), workplace bullying (Trimm and Bernstein, 2016) and both at the same time (Kurtuluş, 2020). Trimm and Bernstein, for example, asked participants how they would react if they were subjected to bullying in their workplace (2016, p.4) while Kurtuluş focused on “how under toxic leadership workplace bullying victims struggle and engage into coping strategies in order to reduce stress-related health and mental problems” (2020, p.1). However, comparatively fewer researchers have dedicated themselves to exploring employee’s lived experiences (see, for example, Bhandarker and Rai, 2019; LaMontagne, 2012; Walker and Watkins, 2020).

According to the tenets of ethnography and participatory action research, real observations are more revealing than self-reported opinions since toxicity is not easily recognized or verbalized. In theory, individuals hypothesize how they might react if confronted with a toxic leader or a toxic environment, but in practice they may have been already exposed to undetected toxicity and reacted on it unknowingly. In such situations, emotions can play a role in the actual decision making and victims could react differently from how they intended to.

For this research paper, any absence of human security is toxic. Using an employee lens, this research investigated how each individual felt, made sense of and reacted to ethical dilemmas or early toxic signs that threatened their dignity - and explored the variety of *actual* responses to them. It is important to reiterate that this study focus on understanding and increasing the human security of employees and their well-being, regardless of the toxicity level of their organization or leaders.

3.3 Great Resignation and Quiet Quitting

It has been challenging for organizations to retain workers, specially after the COVID-19 pandemic. The phenomenon called the Great Resignation depicts a reduction in the aggregate hours worked in an economy, either “because fewer people work (...) or because those who work reduce their hours” (Lee *et al.*, 2023, p.2). Evidence indicates that despite an unusually strong demand for workers, the reduced number of working hours among workers is voluntary.

According to Gallup, among the employees who have not reduced their working hours, the majority is *Quiet Quitting*: “these employees are filling a seat and watching the clock. They put in the minimum effort required, and they are psychologically disconnected from their employer. Although they are minimally productive, they are more likely to be stressed and burnt out than engaged workers because they feel lost and disconnected from their workplace.” (2023, p.4).

Kuzior and colleagues formulated a set of hypothesis to test whether the Great Resignation is primarily caused by ethical, cultural, relational, or personal factors. The researchers introduced the generational factor to investigate which factors attract and keep Millennials (people born between 1980 and 1996) and Generation Z (people born between 1997 and the early 2010s) in their jobs and found out differences: “zoomers (another way to describe Generation Z) do choose a job according to the salary” (Kuzior, Kettler, and Rąb, 2022, p.4). The authors cited several studies about zoomers, including a Pew Research Center survey conducted in January 2020 among American college-age individuals, a study run among Polish representants of Generation Z, and a study conducted by Zenjobs among German young professionals and concluded that “Gen Z, when given a choice between a dull but well-paid job and a position, which offers less money but more satisfying tasks, would 50% go for the latter option” (*Ibid.*).

Although there are differences between the two generations in regard to job attraction, both generations tend to leave their jobs for the same reasons and they are “non-materialistic ones” (Kuzior, Kettler, and Rąb, 2022, p.1). The authors of the study concluded that “what plays a predominant role in pushing workers out of the workplace are more relational factors, such as: not feeling valued by their organizations, (...) not being valued by the managers, (...) and lack of sense of belonging at work” (*Ibid.*, p.6)

Both the Great Resignation and Quiet Quitting can be interpreted as modern forms of alienation from work (*Ibid.*, p.7). These phenomena can be a sign that many of us are involved with tasks or roles that do not contribute significantly to society, lack a clear purpose, or are perceived as pointless, unnecessary, or even harmful – in Graeber’s words, *bullshit jobs* (Graeber, 2018). It is also possible that employees are working in organizations and roles where theoretically their aspirations would be fulfilled, but the ethical dilemmas they experience make them feel undervalued by their organization or by their managers or compromise their sense of belonging at work. If unhealthy workplaces submit their employees to ethical dilemmas and those dilemmas threaten employees’ dignity, this would affect job satisfaction and engagement.

If this holds true, it would mean that certain ethical dilemmas experienced by individuals are further contributing to both the Great Resignation and Quiet Quitting phenomena.

3.4 Competing demands and ethical dilemmas

Although the unit of analysis of this study is the individual – the employee – it is important to consider the organizational environment one is embedded in. By providing such context, this research seeks in part to identify a possible link between competing demands in organizations and dilemmas faced by its organizational members.

Scholars noted that organizations are inherently complex since they have to address competing demands simultaneously: profit versus purpose, short versus long term, global integration and local distinction (Smith and Tracey, 2016, p.455-456). There are two main divergent theories to explain the nature of competing demands: institutional complexity and paradox theory. While the former assumes that tensions can be reconciled, the latter emphasizes “a persistent, underlying relationship between opposing forces that cannot be resolved, but must be accepted and accommodated” (*Ibid.*, p.458-459). Although there is no consensus about their nature, competing demands seems to be prevalent in organizations: researchers even argued that “the essence of organization design is that it be able to deal with contingencies” (Gaim *et al.*, 2018, p2.).

But how do these competing demands translate into dilemmas? Carlson *et al.* contributed significantly to this question when they pointed out that “all dilemmas are not equal. Different organizations may interpret the same dilemma in quite different ways” (2017, p.309). Gaim *et al.* went further, offering a conceptual framework categorizing competing tensions as dilemmas, trade-offs, dialectics, dualities and paradoxes, according to the underlined assumptions. The authors concluded that “problematization is important. Seeing a competing demand as a dilemma when it might best be seen as a paradox not only makes the existing design of an organization that makes such a mis-categorization seem inadequate but it can also derail an organization” (Gaim *et al.*, 2018, p14.).

It’s not only at the organization level that the problematization occurs. At the individual level, “responses based on accepting and engaging tensions inherent in competing demands imply understanding contradiction, tension, and ambiguity as natural conditions of work” (Gaim *et al.*, 2018, p10.). Although Gaim and colleagues recognize the agency and

individuality needed to respond to dilemmas, others observed that individuals are immersed in organizations that “begin to reify their collective perception of the dilemma, which constrains their ability to conceive of different responses” (Carlson *et al.*, 2017, p.309).

Smith and Tracey added another level of complexity when they acknowledged that senior leaders and middle managers have different priorities, therefore experience different demands or challenges (2016, p.461). The authors proposed a more nuanced approach to investigate “how organizational members experience competing demands and how these experiences differ across individuals” (*Ibid.*, p.461-462).

In order to answer the main research question of this study, “based on the empirical data from the two companies in Brazil, how do diverse individuals experience ethical dilemmas in the workplace in the context of human security?”, it is important to define dilemmas and answer the questions that rose up during this research: what characterises an individual dilemma? Are all dilemmas ethical dilemmas? Are ethical dilemmas particularly harmful to employee’s dignity and hence to human security, and if yes, how?

The Oxford Learner’s Dictionary defines dilemma as “a situation that makes problems, often ones in which you have to make a very difficult choice between things of equal importance” (Oxford, 2023) while the Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary defines it as “a situation in which a choice has to be made between possibilities that will all have results you do not want” (Cambridge, 2023). Miller (2018) disagrees with Oxford and distinguishes problems from dilemmas:

“The distinguishing characteristic of all problems is that, once solved, they disappear. A problem does not remain once it is resolved, nor leave you with a sense of loss or regret. “Dilemmas”, on the other hand, require choices that will leave “remainders”, in the form of regret, guilt or simply a poignant memory of personal involvement.”

(Miller, 2018, p2.)

Miller further classifies the term dilemma by combining elements from both Oxford and Cambridge: “A particular type of predicament, which is experienced by everyone at some time or another and which occurs when the pressing alternatives available to us, or serious obligations we face, seem so evenly balanced that is hard, and sometimes impossible, to make

a choice” (Miller, 2018, p.1). However, he warns that making choices is part of our everyday lives and “it would be seriously wrong to limit dilemmas to the great and the good” (*Ibid.*).

Combining all the previous definitions, I provide my own to be used in this research paper: *dilemmas are tricky situations that involve conflict between limited, and often unsatisfactory, options posing challenges to decision-making.* Although dilemmas can involve ethical considerations where the choices made may impact individuals, society, or both, this adopted definition implies that not all dilemmas are ethical dilemmas.

But then, what are ethical dilemmas? Nanteuil (2021) elucidates: “We are often torn between values of equal importance, which distort the way we think and make decisions. In the workplace, the baseline of ethical life is not a *lack* of values, but a *conflict* of values – which the scientific literature generally refers to as an ‘ethical dilemma’ (Nanteuil, 2021, p.2, original emphasis). The author explains that value conflicts are not inherently detrimental; instead they are unavoidable and somewhat reassuring, since they display the plurality of viewpoints. He concludes: “The problem is not so much the existence of value conflicts: it is more the fact that the actors do not have a frame of justice that allows them to overcome these conflicts without renouncing their deeply held values” (Nanteuil, 2021, p.10).

In summary, ethical dilemmas seem to be particularly harmful to individuals’ dignity because individuals have to renounce something they deeply value. If we recover the UNDP’s definition of dignity in relation to respect, agency and equality (UNDP, 2022, p.93), it is logical that *lack of respect* (for example, bullying and harassment), *lack of agency* (powerlessness, vulnerability, among others) and *lack of equality* (oppression and discrimination, to name a few) are serious threats to any employee.

In order to answer the main research question, as noted earlier, this investigation engaged with the three following sub questions:

1. What are the common ethical dilemmas individuals experience in their workplaces?
2. How do different individuals feel, interpret and react to dilemmas in the same work environment?
3. What are the practices of ascertaining human security by individuals under perceived organizational threats?

4.0 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used in this research paper, displayed below in Figure 2, was developed by the author and combines the modern concept of Human Security (Gasper, 2022; UNDP, 2022) with concepts of ethical dilemmas (Nanteuil, 2021), affects and practices. The latter two concepts have been borrowed from the field of interpretive policy analysis that emphasises the importance of subjectivity over objectivity, affective experiences over cold rationalisations, and practices of individuals over their attitudes and beliefs (e.g. Freeman, Griggs and Boaz, 2011).

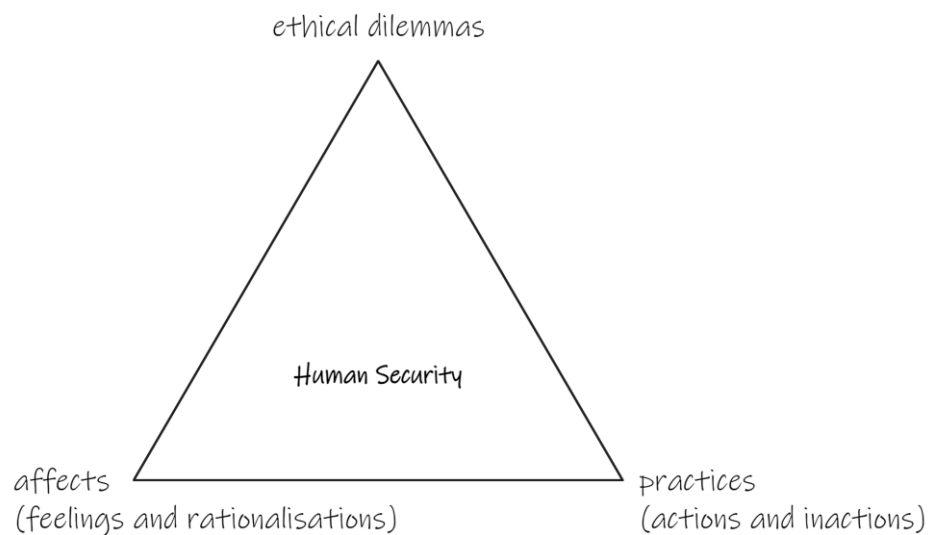


Figure 1: theoretical framework, developed by the author

The model puts human security at the centre, representing that the objective of this research is to understand and increase human security of employees. In its turn, since the modern conception of human security is described as “freedom from fear (fear of violence and death), freedom from want (serious material deprivation), and freedom to live in dignity” (Gasper, 2022, p.2), any type of violence towards an employee or the perception of job insecurity or menaces to employees’ dignity are threats to employees’ human security.

But how these menaces and threats to human security present themselves to employees? One possibility is through ethical dilemmas. Nanteuil explained that ethical dilemmas emerge from conflict between deeply held individual values and divergent organizational values (2021,

p.10). So, when faced with ethical dilemmas, what did individuals feel and how did they rationalize about their feelings? And more important, how did they respond to those ethical dilemmas? In other words, what were their practices – actions and inactions?

In academic literature, particularly in fields such as psychology and sociology, the term "affect" refers to the experience and display of emotions or feelings. Affect encompasses a broad range of subjective, emotional states that can include moods, sentiments, and emotional responses (see, for example: Heise, 1979; Zajonc, 1984). Durnová (2015) explains that to investigate emotions in deliberation can “enables us to see the tension between the individual and the collective dimension of emotional experience” (p.223). The author mentions other ways that looking at emotions can be revealing: “emotions point to values and beliefs that are shared among actors of a particular group. These groups distinguish themselves from others on the basis of this shared experience” (*Ibid.*, p.225). Additionally, “the emotional lens reveals that some discourses are prioritized over others through the prioritization of some values” (*Ibid.*, p.227). For this research paper, emotions were taken seriously since I genuinely believe that emotion is part of meaning (Stone, 2013, p.25). By investigating emotions, concealed tensions between employees and their organization can be revealed. Moreover, such investigation can shed light on which values and beliefs were prioritized by employees and their workplaces.

Finally, exploring practical struggles can be more enlightening than examining “events that never happened” (Forester, 2012, p.14). Since individual actions and inactions – practices - can be influenced by the context, Forester suggests that we examine them “in the face of power” (*Ibid.*, p.12). He concludes: “ordinary people do extraordinary things to confront inequalities of power and life chances, to gain respect and recognition, to transform social and political relations in ways that will promote rather than prevent human flourishing” (*Ibid.*, p.24). This research paper then examined real practices rather than opinions, more specifically what employees did or did not do when they encountered an ethical dilemma, in the context of power imbalance they were embedded in.

5.0 Methodology

5.1 Research Design

I hypothesized the ethical dilemmas organization members experience depend on a series of factors like the nature of the organization they work in (governmental, NGO or corporate sector), country or countries the organization is situated, level of market concentration (monopoly, oligopoly, free market leader, free market contender) and the individual's own level in the company. To manage some of these factors, for this research, I limited my investigation to the corporate sector, specifically two Brazilian subsidiaries of multinational companies. For the remaining of this paper, they will be referenced as Organization A and Organization B.

Organization A was chosen originally due to its particular policy of *promote from within*, in which it only hires individuals at the start of their careers, allows select individuals to rise the ranks, and does not outsource for senior positions. Typically, students join this organization as interns and a few selected are promoted as a junior employee right after receiving their bachelor's degree. Every leader working at Organization A started at the bottom of the hierarchical pyramid and has been promoted, including at the CXO level. If a mid or senior level employee decides to leave the company, or if the organization terminates someone's employment agreement, another junior employee is promoted to fill the position.

Additionally, Organization A is internally remarked up as being a *high-performance organization*, meaning that performance is rewarded: individuals who consistently deliver great results tend to be promoted faster and more often. High-performance also relates to the organization's tendency to try and outgrow competitors. Lastly, Organization A, with its *promotion from within* policy operates similarly as organizations in the public sector, which can increase the relevance of the research findings.

By contrast, Organization B does *not* have the *promotion from within* policy and, as most organizations, fills mid and senior-level positions through both outsourcing and internally. However, company performance is as important for Organization B as it is for Organization A. Hence, I hypothesized that ethical dilemmas were considerably present for individuals working in either high-performance environments. By interviewing multiple employees from two different organizations, I intended to identify common ethical dilemmas they faced, regardless of the organization they worked for.

It is important to notice that, although I had some ideas about which kind of ethical dilemmas participants might have faced, I decided to use a bottom-up approach and listen to the employees to investigate which tensions they have observed, if any, what they felt and how they interpreted and coped with the experiences. Rather than assuming any tension or ethical

dilemma from the outset, I let them emerge from the field and, after the analysis of the interviews, I concluded the typology of dilemmas.

5.2 Research Methods

I conducted in-depth, semi-structure interviews with participants from both organizations: ten interviews with participants from Organization A, being five with current employees and five with former employees and three with former employees from Organization B. To protect the identity of participants, they are referred to as Participant #1, Participant #2 and so forth. Participants from #1 to #10 worked or still work at Organization A, while Participants #11 to #13 worked for Organization B. Interviews had typically 45 minutes to one hour duration each. Appendix 2 contains the questionnaire used to guide the interviews.

Participants were selected purposefully according to their gender, hierarchical level, age, years of experience and current situation (former employee or current employee of the organization). This strategy is called *mapping for exposure* and it is based on the belief that there are multiple interpretations of social and political events: “the concept of exposure rests on the notion that the research wants to encounter, or to be exposed to, the wide variety of meanings made by research-relevant participants of their experiences (...) in different roles, at different levels of responsibility (...) across a corporate hierarchy or different levels of a bureaucracy” (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012, p.85).

During the investigation, interviews followed the conceptual framework below, developed by the author. The sections in red highlight the focus of the study:

1. **Ethical Dilemmas** – identified common ethical dilemmas (Nanteuil, 2021) experienced by participants.
2. **Feelings** – explored the emotions felt by individuals when faced with ethical dilemmas.
3. **Rationalization** – investigated how individuals make sense of their work environment’s levels of respect, agency, equality and trust (UNDP, 2022).
4. **Practices** – described real actions and conscious inactions taken by individuals, considering their affects (feelings and rationalization).

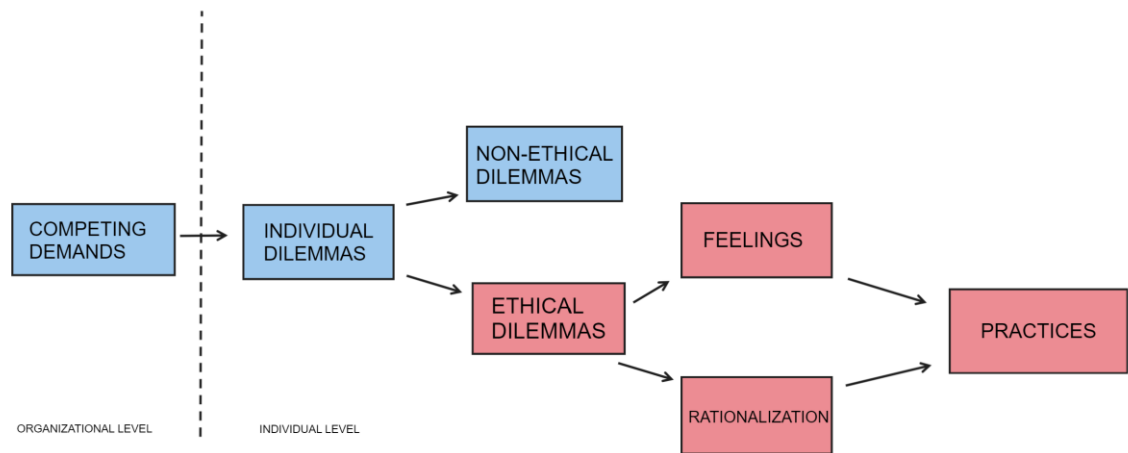


Figure 2: Conceptual framework used for interviews, developed by the author

The words of Schwartz-Shea and Yanow reveal my beliefs and elucidate how I approached the interviews:

“A researcher can interview based on the belief that there are multiple perceived and/or experienced social “realities” concerning what happened, rather than a singular “truth”. In this view, the researcher would assume that event narratives are likely to vary depending on the perspective (political, cultural, experiential, etc.) of the persons being interviewed. This approach reflects a constructivist-interpretivist methodology that rests on a belief in the existence of (potentially) multiple, *intersubjectively* constructed “truths” about social, political, cultural and other human events; and on the belief that these understandings can only be accessed, or co-generated, through interactions between researcher and researched as they seek to interpret those events and make those interpretations legible to each other.”

(Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012, p.4)

Interviews were conducted online via video conference due to budget constraints and were held in Portuguese (the native Brazilian language), and then translated to English for this paper. Although conducting interviews in person is considered by some the “gold standard” for qualitative research (Sy *et al.*, 2020), others argue virtual interviews “work well as a viable alternative” (Lo Iacono, Symonds and Brown, 2016, p.1) and that it is possible to achieve “high-quality, rigorous, ethical qualitative research in a virtual format” (Roberts, Pavlakis and Richards, 2021, p.10). Acknowledging that virtual interviews could present specific

challenges, I used the tool provided by Roberts and colleagues in the appendix of their work “It’s More Complicated Than It Seems: Virtual Qualitative Research in the COVID-19 Era.” (*Ibid.*) as support for my decision-making around virtual qualitative research. Please refer to Appendix 3 for more information.

For interpretive research, the way knowledge is co-created with participants and the objective of the investigation invalidate most positivist evaluative standards of research quality as validity, reliability, replicability and objectivity. In order to assure high quality interpretive research, scholars recommend *designing for trustworthiness*: contextualizing local knowledge, developing meaning-making with participants, mapping for exposure and being flexible enough to revise the design as needed. The most adequate criteria to evaluate such an undertaking should be trustworthiness, systematicity, reflexivity, transparency and engagement with positionality (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012, p.113).

5.3 Limitations

There are several limitations in this proposed study. First, it relied on narratives of both current and former employees, and scholars have warned that human memory is fallible, and information retrieved through memory recall is usually less precise and less reliable (Molund, Göran and Sida, 2007, p.31). Second, there is risk former employees were excessively critical and negative about their former experiences while current employees were *imprecisely* positive to the same degree – after all, if they decided to stay, there are chances they are satisfied with the organization and *vice-versa*.

Another limitation is the data generation. Although participants co-created knowledge through their narratives, the way people act in daily life may be different from what they externalize, individually or collectively. In this sense, findings could have been more enlightening if complemented with participatory or ethnographic research.

I had initially planned to conduct archival research and to examine the final interviews employees give to Human Resources when they are fired or leave their organization, but I did not have access to these documents. The combination of in-depth interviews and archival research would have increased the internal validity of the study. Schwartz-Shea and Yanow explained that for interpretive research, rather than using the language of *triangulation* of sources, it’s recommended that researchers use *intertextuality*: the authors explain the terminology does not have the same expectation that multiple sources will converge to the same point “given the multiple ways in which humans can make sense of the same event, document,

artifact, etc. convergence is in fact expected to occur less often than inconsistency or even contradiction” (2012, p.88).

In addition, as characteristic of an interpretive study, the present study is unlikely to define causality. At most, this research will provide *constitutive causality*, “which engages how humans conceive of their worlds, the language they use to describe them, and other elements constituting that social world, which make possible or impossible the interactions they pursue” (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012, p.52). In other words, the knowledge generated by this research is context-specific and is focused on examining “how the actors (...) understand their contexts, explicitly and/or tacitly, and why they conduct themselves in particular ways” (*Ibid.*).

Finally, the research does not intend to be representative of all organizations. By design, the study is too specific in sector, country and context. While a narrow focus may be a strength for academic research, the findings are unlikely to be applicable to other organizations, countries or sectors, weakening the study’s relevance.

5.4 Positionality

Yanow remarked that reflexivity “plays an increasingly central role in interpretive science: attention to the ways in which the researcher’s positionality, whether literally locational (within the research setting) or personal (with respect, e.g., to demographic or experiential factors), can affect access to a research site and/or to people or other sources of information within it, and thereby the kinds of data generated” (2009, p.585).

I approached this topic as a former corporate sector employee, who usually observed and felt incongruences between discourse and practice in the workplace and struggled with ethical dilemmas and toxic leaders. I have also experienced *healthy* workplaces and supportive leaders, which helped me to evolve both professionally and personally. Curiously, I have experienced both sides of the spectrum in the same organization, which leads me to think that healthy work environments cannot be take for granted, but also that, toxic work environments could be fixed before the toxicity spreads. Although organizational context matters, my personal observation suggests that individual experiences differ and, as a consequence, the individual reaction likely also differs. At its heart, this difference is what my research aims to understand: how different people view, react to and experience the same environment. As Schwartz-Shea and Yanow pointed out “new understanding emerging from prior knowledge, including experiential knowledge – is seen as an integral part of interpretive methodologies” (2012, p.26).

My previous experience working for similar companies grants me a higher level of understanding of the context, as well as privileged access to current and former employees. In interpretive research, although insights emerge from previous knowledge, the researcher learns during the investigation and “changes in design cannot, therefore, be understood as threats to trustworthiness of a research endeavour that does not understand causality in this way” (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012, p.73)

My positionality was critical to access actors and co-generate knowledge based on previous experience. Nonetheless, as noted by Eyre, researchers do not approach a research as a “clean slate” (2011, p.11) and it is not possible to segregate the person that I am and the researcher conducting this study. Since I faced the same challenges as previous academics, I adopted the same strategies mentioned by Eyre:

“The challenge for me was making sure that this research did not simply become a justification for my prior interpretation. I confronted this challenge in two ways. First, I had to acknowledge that my own experience was helpful, but limited. (...) This called for frequent self-reflection. Second, instead of separating myself from the policy situation in a search for objectivity, I invited criticism from all relevant actors (and still do) to check for bias and misrepresentation in my work. In these ways, any prejudices on my own side could be counteracted.”

(Eyre, 2011, p11.)

During the interviews, I aimed to adopt a balance between *stranger-ness* (or a very stark external objectivity) and *familiarity* (in which situated knowers know how to navigate their settings in a way that is somewhat unfamiliar to a stranger) (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012, p.29).

Finally, my previous relations with some of the participants was not an excuse to “not maintain a professional distance, but instead report and interpret everything from their participants' perspectives” (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015, p.75).

5.5 Ethical Challenges

According to Fujii, “ethics should matter to everyone, not just those who spend extended time in the field; and that ethics is an ongoing responsibility, not a discrete task to be checked

off the researcher's to do list" (2012, p.717). This research was designed to observe ethical principles throughout all the process, from selecting possible interviewees, to seeking participatory consent, assuring anonymity and confidentiality, reinforcing the nature of voluntary participation, the right to abstain from answering any question participants feel uncomfortable and even to the right to drop the interview process. To reaffirm both confidentiality and anonymity, neither interviewees nor their organizations were disclosed. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, manually coded and the audio files erased after data analysis. Participants were referred to as Participant #1, Participant #2 and so on to protect their identities. I made a difficult and important decision of not displaying a table with participants' characteristics like gender, age, hierarchy and time in company because the presence of identifiable data could have compromised their anonymity – even acknowledging that these data would have provided more nuance and enriched the findings.

Although not exhaustive, this list of purposeful actions aims to illustrate my view of "ethics in practice" rather than "procedural ethics" (Fujii, 2012) – and my utmost respect for those I consider co-creators of knowledge, not objects (Yanow, 2009, p.588). This is particularly important for this research paper methodology since "in interpretive social science, ethical concerns are not a separate subject, but instead emerge throughout the project" (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, 2012, p.22).

In the same way couples do not plan to divorce on the day of their marriage, researchers do not plan to be unethical from the start. The challenges, in both cases, occur *during* the process. Kvale and Brinkmann exemplified how this can happen: "when interviewers are under pressure to deliver results, whether to a commercial employer or to their own research publication, their show of empathy may become a means to circumvent the participant's informed consent and persuade interviewees to disclose experiences and emotions that they later decide they may have preferred to keep to themselves or even "not know." (2015, p.75).

Considering the above, I did not limit myself to comply only with my academic institution (International Institute of Social Studies – ISS) official ethical form submission to the Board of Examiners: I decided to prepare and submit an additional ethical protocol, which has been reviewed by my research supervisor before undertaking the investigation. The adopted protocol, consists on a set of 16 ethical questions to be answered at the start of an interview study such as "what are the beneficial consequences of the study?" and "what are the consequences of the study for the participants subjects?" – see Kvale and Brinkmann (2015, p.68) for the full list of recommended questions. Even if not mandatory, such protocol was helpful to me to reflect in advance about possible risks and ethical challenges and try to avoid

they to occur or at least to minimize their impact. For more information, please refer to Appendix 1.

Acknowledging that ethical issues can emerge in any phase of the research process (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015, p.63), I shall not forget that to act ethically before, during and after the study is my responsibility as researcher. In the wise words of Fujii, I must remind myself that “to enter another’s world as a researcher is a privilege, not a right” (2012, p.718).

6.0 Findings

6.1 Dilemmas, affects and practices

In order to understand common ethical dilemmas employees faced in the workplace, I followed the conceptual framework (Figure 2) and asked participants: “have you experienced multiple priorities and/or competing demands at this organization? If yes, what was the conflict?”. The objective was to understand how each individual experienced the competing demands that exist at the organizational level. Since every participant might have experienced them differently, I referred to their personal experiences as individual dilemmas. After that, I investigated whether the individual dilemma was revealing a conflict of values between the individual and their organization – criterion to categorize the individual dilemma an ethical one - and finally, identified which dimension of human security was under threat.

Data co-generated during fieldwork showed that all participants, from both organizations, experienced individual ethical dilemmas in their workplaces, regardless of their age, gender, time working for the company and hierarchical level. In addition, the majority of them experienced more than one ethical dilemma during the period they were working there and, finally, some dilemmas were coincident amongst interviewees.

After making sense of participants’ stories, I manually coded ethical dilemmas and counted 14 different types of dilemmas, listed in Table 1 below:

Dilemmas faced by participants	Count (# of mentions)
do the right thing versus delivering expected performance	5
unrealistic goals	5
multiple priorities	3
collective versus individual targets	2
competition versus colaboration	2
meritocracy versus interpersonal relations	2
standardization versus customization	1
follow the process versus being fair	1
discourse versus practice	1
innovation versus marginal changes	1
competing individual targets	1
standardization vs customization	1
medium versus long term	1
be nice versus be genuine	1

Table 1: Common dilemmas faced by employees, developed by the author

Although all experiences and dilemmas are valid and worth further consideration, I decided to investigate the dilemmas mentioned at least by two different participants. In that sense, I could examine if and how common dilemmas led to different affects and practices. In the next paragraphs, I will illustrate with stories shared by participants describing how *unrealistic goals*, *multiple priorities*, *meritocracy versus interpersonal relations*, *competition versus collaboration* and *the incongruence between collective and individual goals* were experienced by participants as ethical dilemmas. I will also argue that many of these dilemmas could fit under the umbrella of a bigger dilemma: *doing the right thing versus delivering expected performance*. Since I will argue that the most prevalent dilemma can be understood as a combination of the others, I start with the second most recurrent and proceed until I cover all dilemmas mentioned by at least two participants. Finally, since *competition versus collaboration* can be influenced by *the incongruence between collective and individual goals*, I will merge those two.

Each ethical dilemma was examined through employees' affects (feelings and rationalizations) and practices (actions and inactions). Table 2 displays dilemmas according to each participant:

Ethical Dilemmas experienced by employees from Organization A (Participants #1 to #10) and from Organization B (Participants #11 to #13)		
Participant #1	Participant #2	Participant #3
multiple priorities unrealistic goals competition vs collaboration	meritocracy vs relations multiple priorities	do the right thing vs results meritocracy vs relations
Participant #4	Participant #5	Participant #6
do the right thing vs results unrealistic goals	follow the process vs being fair robust processes but people are fallible	unrealistic goals discourse vs practice do the right thing vs results
Participant #7	Participant #8	Participant #9
do the right thing vs results	standardization vs customization multiple priorities medium vs long term	unrealistic goals innovation vs marginal changes
Participant #10		
do the right thing vs results		
Participant #11	Participant #12	Participant #13
competition vs collaboration collective vs individual targets	collective vs individual targets be nice vs be genuine unrealistic goals	standardization vs customization

Table 2: Dilemmas by participant, developed by the author

“Frustrated” was the word used by the vast majority of participants from both organizations to describe what they felt when faced with an ethical dilemma. Many also felt “stressed”, “overwhelmed”, “depleted” or simply “bad”. Some of them mentioned feeling “outraged”, “undervalued”, “lonely” and “vulnerable”. When individual targets were not met, they usually felt “incompetent”. Finally, while some of them perceived themselves as “voiceless” inside the organization, others felt heard.

Some participants believed that “the human side prevails”: they argued people can understand context and prioritized relations over sticking to organizational processes. On the other side, a group of participants, particularly from Organization A, repeated the same mantra: that they did (or had to) “trust the process”. This second group believed that complying with organizational procedures was as important as, and even more important than, interpersonal relations.

Actions and inactions taken by individuals were also very diverse. Those who believed that relations should be prioritized tended to collaborate more with colleagues, participated in multifunctional taskforces and negotiated with their leaders and peers to find a “middle-ground”. They also tried to connect their individual targets with other’s targets to engage them, proposed alternatives and sometimes refrained from giving their genuine opinion to preserve

relations. Some individuals deliberately invested time on building strategic relationships, or as Participant #8 said “generating trust as an enabler” to do what they needed to do. Participant #9, from the same organization, admitted having built “insincere” but strategic alliances and collaborated with others to benefit his career. According to Participant #9, “absolute honesty wouldn't take you anywhere” when it comes to career development in Organization A.

The most resounding “inaction” shared by *all* participants from Organization A was not-reporting misbehaviors. It was also surprising that every participant shared at least one episode in which they had been a victim of, or had witnessed, moral harassment, sexual harassment, prejudice or all of the above. The decision of not to say anything came from a common belief that reporting would be useless and, in some cases, even harmful to their careers. Participants had witnessed other situations where the victim of inappropriate behavior proceeded with a formal complaint to Human Resources (HR) or their leaders and ended up being punished for it: from simple things like being excluded from corporate events, to critical aggressions like losing a promotion or even being fired.

6.1.1 Unrealistic Goals

Contextualizing, all participants from Organization A mentioned they constantly felt pressured to reach their targets. They acknowledged that sometimes targets were “reasonable”, but some specific months were particularly challenging. Pressure tended to build up since whenever monthly targets were not met, individuals had to, or at least tried to, “compensate” during the following months to reach their yearly targets. Participant #2 explained that “the competitive environment eventually extrapolated” and Participant #4 described “an enormous pressure” to deliver yearly targets. Participant #12, from Organization B, also mentioned the same dilemma.

Being aware that they work for a *high-performance organization*, employees from Organization A and Organization B seemed to be both committed to and concerned with their individual goals. They examined their monthly and yearly targets as soon as they were received, and sometimes observed “unrealistic” or “incongruent” numbers. Participant #1 alluded to these *unrealistic goals* as “fictional numbers”, a surreal target, impossible to deliver. According to him, these targets were misaligned with his customers’ realities and claimed that Organization A ignored the supply-demand mismatch.

When confronted with perceived *unrealistic goals*, participants felt “frustrated” (Participant #1), “bad” (Participant #4), “stressed” (Participant #6), “incompetent” (Participant #9) and “outraged” (Participant #12). Participant #5 mentioned he sometimes felt “guilty”, unless he was confident he had done everything he could have done to meet his targets. The wide variety of emotions triggered by *unrealistic goals* led to a multiplicity of actions.

Some participants asked for additional company investment in order to reach their challenging goals, but they usually received less than requested. There were occasions in which they did not receive any incremental investment. Others tried to build a “bottom-up” number, to compare with the “top-down” number received. While the former is calculated by considering each individual inventory and demand and is then aggregated to a total number that is “reasonable”, the latter comes from the necessity of Organization A to reach a determined target, and partially disregards inventory and demand levels. The rationale behind this exercise was to try to convince their leaders that their customers could not buy or that the market could not absorb such a big volume. They argued that there was a gap between the “top-down” and the “bottom-up” numbers and that they could not close the gap. Participant #3 mentioned that once she was successful to reduce her objective but, at the end, it was “useless”, because the target remained with her immediate leader. In addition, the confrontation irritated her manager, who kept pressuring her to deliver the original target.

There were reports of employees performing activities they believed would be ineffective just to demonstrate obedience or loyalty. Participant #2 shared an incident where his leader called them at the end of the month asking why they weren’t pushing the customer to buy more. Despite trying to convince the leader that the customer just wouldn’t purchase at that moment, he was forced to pay the customer a call, driving hours only to be turned away because he showed up unannounced at the customer’s office. When asked why he did this, the interviewee clarified that he had to show his efforts even though he knew the customer would not buy.

Participant #6 also related disobedience. When asked by his leader to visit his customer again and sell additional volume, the interviewee commented he was sure the customer would not buy and believed that another push could harm their relationship. He decided to lie, telling his leader he would meet the client, but in actuality did not.

When asked how he reacted in a similar situation, Participant #1 reasoned: “I could never give my real opinion (to my organization or to my leader about how unrealistic the goal was), because I would be seen as *reactive* (meaning resistant or reluctant)”. He clarified that he tried to deliver “the maximum possible” and was transparent with his customers about the need for more and the pressure he was receiving from Organization A. With this honest and transparent

communication with his customers, sometimes he was able to deliver the *unrealistic goals* thanks to his good relationship with them.

On other occasions, after exhausting their alternatives, participants admitted having failed to *do the right thing* due to insurmountable pressure. In a particular fiscal year closing, Participant #4 felt forced to sell a volume higher than he believed was coherent. He tried to argue internally with his leadership and warned them about the risks of the operation, but he was told to proceed anyway. Against his will, he did it. After some time, he and a lot of other employees were dismissed since this episode was considered an accounting fraud. His leaders continued in the organization. He described feeling “naïve and helpless” for having caved to the pressure for results.

Nonetheless, those who resisted the pressure to deliver those *unrealistic goals*, instead continuing to *do the right thing*, reported having suffered consequences, either for having failed to *deliver to the expected performance* level or for having not done what they were told to do. For instance, when asked to submit fake orders – ones there unsolicited from any client but would inflate the organization’s perceived results, many participants declined to do so. They mentioned that, in retaliation for their disobedience, they were punished: lost deserved promotions, were excluded from meetings, and ultimately felt isolated or ostracized. Participant #10 confronted her leader by saying “I am sorry, but I won’t do this. If you want to do it, do it yourself, using your login and password”. After that, the interviewee purportedly feedback from her leader, saying that she had been “inflexible”. According to the interviewee, the situation got so unsustainable that she started looking for job opportunities in other organizations and ultimately left Organization A.

6.1.2 Multiple Priorities

Another recurrent dilemma, mentioned by 3 interviewees from Organization A, was facing *multiple priorities*. Participants also noted seeing priorities change frequently, resulting in confusion about what was expected of them, and potentially affecting their performance output. Participant #1 claimed that every manager had his “own agenda” and as management shifted frequently, he had to learn how to “surf the waves”. His analogy with the unpredictability of the sea, with its high and low waves, calm and turbulent periods and constant changes of direction and intensity suggests employees themselves had to learn how to navigate and adapt to constant changes.

When faced with *multiple priorities*, participants mentioned having felt “frustrated” (Participant #1 and Participant #8) and “voiceless” (Participant #1). Participant #3 simply reported a “bad feeling”. Participant #8 believed that “having voice or not” depends on the employee’s manager, but in most cases, she would agree with the Participant #1, which can be illustrated by her comment about the efficacy of discussing the *multiple priorities* with the management: “saying was useless”.

Participant #6 comments about well-being can also be linked with *multiple priorities*. He remarked that Organization A is more concerned with employees’ wellbeing now as compared to previous years. He mentioned weekly check-ins done by the leadership to induce a better work life-balance. At the same time, he noticed a reduction in the pressure to perform and detected that the discourse about *doing the right thing* is being more repeated than ever. However, he believed these three *multiple priorities* could not coexist. He explained that he prioritized *doing the right thing*, dealing with substantial operational workload and following all the processes to “not be fired”. As a second priority, he focused on delivering the targets, but he did not feel he had time to take care of his wellbeing. When questioned about the sustainability of this strategy for his health, he acknowledged that this was a “time bomb”.

Participant #7 on the other hand prioritized performance over *doing the right thing*, although she did focus on being “borderline correct”. She drew the boundary at committing fraud, but did not hesitate to take more risks in order to deliver results and further her career. Again in her case, wellbeing was compromised against competing priorities.

For Organization A, this trifecta involving *multiple priorities* - *doing the right thing*, performance and wellbeing - also seems to have consequences, since participants report lower growth rates compared to previous years.

6.1.3 Meritocracy versus Interpersonal Relations

Many participants observed that, depending on how leadership viewed or valued a person, someone’s misbehaviors would be viewed and treated differently. Participant #2 illustrated this, saying that there was “two weights and two measures”. He argued that Organization A was lenient with employees the leaders considered high performers or highly talented. According to him, a “regular” employee was more likely to be fired for unacceptable behavior compared to a “talented” employee, implying unequal treatment and thus much higher stress and negative lifestyle indicators.

Equally disturbingly, two other participants used a similar rationale to explain why they did not report cases of sexual harassment against them. Participant #10 said that “HR was sexist” and he (the assaulter) was a “star” (meaning the individual was considered a talent). The other victim, Participant #8, said the same thing but went further, expressing concern around how the statement would be taken without any physical evidence to back up her claim: in effect a he-said/she-said situation in which she would not have won, and also she was likely to have faced severe backlash within the company for it. None of these were isolated incidents in Organization A: many believed that those who dared to question or refuse a corporate demand would receive a black mark, implying that they would not be considered for future promotions, and that their firing was simply a matter of time.

Although most participants consider the evaluation process robust and fair, mentioning peer-review, written evaluations, constant feedback and calibration session as good practices, some of them questioned extent to which interpersonal relations could influence these evaluations. Others claimed that, while it was robust, the evaluation process was also fallible given its dependence on other people. Participant #5 illustrated this by saying that “the company has no arms and legs...interpersonal relations are the most important”. According to him, human-led evaluations will always be somewhat unjust because different people think differently. He concluded by stating that the best the organization can do is to be respectful to its employees, since the evaluations will probably be unfair.

Other participants concur: inevitably, evaluations are subjective. Take for example the repeated occurrences in Organization A of leaders asking their reports to input fake orders, a renowned example of malpractice. From one side, employees were evaluated primarily by their leaders and they were aware that if they refused to do what they have asked to do or simply confronted their leaders, they would probably be retaliated. From the other side, they were told to always *do the right thing*, which technically would include reporting malpractices. But this paradox remained unresolved: when leaders asked their employees to do something that was considered wrong even by the company (in official documents), employees had to either succumb to the pressure of that request, or stand up against it but hope that their interpersonal relationships with evaluators otherwise was strong enough to protect their jobs. The situation is tricky and the response from individuals varied according to their judgment of what was more prevalent – meritocracy or interpersonal relationships.

6.1.4 The incongruence between collective and individual goals

In Organization B, all participants were confronted with one same dilemma: *the incongruence between individual and collective goals*. According Participant #11, objectives were misaligned, which hampered cooperation among areas and individuals and inevitably generated conflicts. Participant #13 argued that 80% of their individual evaluation depended on corporate results in which they had limited influence, and only 20% was under their control. This evaluation method was described by Participant #11 as “schizophrenic” because the company was “evaluating individual performance through collective indicators”.

Emotions associated with this dilemma were “frustration” (Participant #11 and Participant #13), “indignation” (Participant #12), “loneliness” (Participant #11) and “vulnerability” (Participant #11). When it comes to rationalization, Participant #11 believes that “conflicts are inevitable but they are good for innovation”, but he also thinks there is a “sweet spot between hiding problems and let people discuss by themselves”. He did this comment to explain targets can be revised to become congruent but without proper organizational support, there is no productive discussion.

In such context, individuals who needed to obtain support to achieve their personal targets needed to negotiate with others, resulting in needing to compromise their own interests and values somewhat in order to meet in the middle. Participant #12 mentioned that, as she was unable to receive support from a particular business unit, she had to identify who were the local leaders to try to influence and engage them. She implied that she would only receive support from them if she was successful to make them believe it was their original idea, not hers.

Participants mentioned that discussions were not always genuine. Organization B appeared to prioritize interpersonal relations, with individuals avoiding conflict for the greater good of the collective. Participant #13 analogized the organization’s culture: “this company was not a mother, it was a grandmother, who spoils their grandchildren.” She then continued, suggesting “excessive care hampers development” and that this collective behavior would interfere in both organizational and individual development.

Participants from Organization A did not mention this dilemma, which suggests that they believe individual targets and collective targets were usually coherent between themselves. However, the common perception of unrealistic goals in Organization A, might have exacerbated the competition among individuals, since *competition versus collaboration* was mentioned by two participants from that company.

6.2 Promotion from within

The main difference between Organization A and Organization B is, respectively, the presence and the absence of the *promotion from within* policy. I was particularly intrigued by how individuals from organization A experienced it and how this policy might have shaped ethical dilemmas individuals confronted.

All interviewees from Organization A, current and former employees, agree that they have “learned a lot” and several feel grateful because the company invested much in their personal and professional development. Former employees recognize some skills and fundamentals they have learned in Organization A are extremely important and acknowledge that they still use those skills frequently. As Participant #1 said, “they really formed the people”.

Participant #6 described the *promotion from within* policy differently. According to him, one is “molded into the culture”. He observed that by hiring unexperienced individuals and giving them standardized and intensive training, people tend to learn and replicate the expected behavior and adjust themselves to the organizational culture. Participant #2 mentioned that this practice induces a “strong culture”.

Some participants observed that the organization itself benefits from this policy: both as an attraction factor for aspiring candidates and as a retention factor for current employees. A former HR employee considered it a “great long term strategy”.

Most participants also identified a shortcoming of this particular policy: “there is no diversity of thought”, explained Participant #8. Her opinion was echoed by Participant #2 who mentioned the lack of “oxygenation” in the organization. Participant #6 claimed that “less diversity limits learning”, making a point that Organization A and its employees lose the opportunity to learn from other organizations.

7. Discussion

To answer the first sub-question of this research, “what are the common ethical dilemmas individuals experience in their workplaces?”, I started by understanding and then categorizing the dilemmas people are likely to face in a workplace. In Organization A, where, as you may recall, *promotion from within* was prevalent, the core dilemmas identified were *unrealistic goals*, *multiple priorities*, *meritocracy versus interpersonal relations* and *competition versus*

collaboration, while, in Organization B, where reputation and external hiring were more commonplace, the *incongruence between collective and individual goals* was prevalent.

First, it is necessary to account for the high-performance environment both organizations fostered, and that this might have shaped the dilemmas employees faced (Carlson *et al.*, 2017, p.307). On the one hand, since all participants from both firms have faced one or more ethical dilemma, findings suggest that facing ethical dilemmas in the workplace is a commonplace, at least for employees working for high-performance organizations. On the other hand, the variety of the dilemmas experienced by participants from Organization A and from Organization B, might imply that organizational culture plays a role in which values and beliefs are prioritized and, as a consequence, which organizational values will be eventually confronted with employees' personal values.

If facing ethical dilemmas in high-performance organizations is inevitable, employees would have few options rather than trying to work for the company which aligns best with their personal values. However, this strategy is not easy to be followed, since organizational practices might differ from organizational discourse. For instance, even if employees from Organization A were trained and alerted by the organization to always *do the right thing*, individuals who observed unpunished misbehaviors or their own leaders doing something "wrong", were able to justifying malpractice to deliver a result themselves. In contrast, if organizational members perceive malpractices are punished, and interpret that results are only valid if obtained following the rules, they will probably comply with the norms, even when they are suffering big pressure for performance.

For participants from Organization A, there is no single answer to the question: "what does *doing the right thing* mean"? When faced with *multiple priorities*, individuals may try to prioritize themselves, or end up constantly checking which tasks actually should be prioritized. A common response participants received from their leaders was that a specific given task was also a priority, but, paraphrasing some interviewees, if everything is a priority, nothing is priority. Since it was usually not possible to deliver everything the company expected from them, some individuals compromised their wellbeing, working extra-hours during weekdays and weekends. But, according to Organization A, this is also not the right thing to do. The corporate discourse claims for work-life balance, which participants cannot experiment without compromising the delivery of the expected results. This suggests that many dilemmas could fit under a bigger dilemma of *doing the right thing versus delivering expected performance*.

If individuals presume that they won't be able to achieve a work-life balance and deliver the expected results and if they believe results are critical to maintain their jobs, they have to

make a choice and sacrifice one of them – findings suggest that they usually sacrifice themselves. Since work-life balance is reported to be very difficult to achieve in practice, particularly without jeopardizing performance, this dilemma can be associated with *freedom from want* - poor performance activating the fear of losing job. Additionally, *freedom to live in dignity* can be compromised when individuals have to sacrifice their personal well-being to handle many priorities and achieve the expected performance.

Findings also suggest that *unrealistic goals* at the organizational level can result in individual ethical dilemmas, where employees need to balance personal ethics with professional ambition, and thus struggle to reconcile equally important human needs. Again, the fear of losing job (*freedom from want*), might force employees to submit a fake order or adopt some misbehavior that harms their own dignity (*freedom to live in dignity*). Finally, in many instances their own leaders ask them to commit the wrongdoing, which is sometimes done due to the fear of suffering reprisals (*freedom from fear*).

Participants who faced *meritocracy versus interpersonal relations* dilemmas felt “bad” (Participant #2), “vulnerable” (Participant #10) and “frustrated” (Participant #10 and Participant #8). Stories shared by participants indicated lack of equality (oppression and discrimination), lack of respect (bullying, moral harassment and sexual harassment) and lack of agency (powerlessness and vulnerability), hence their dignity was harmed. *Freedom to live in dignity* was compromised in their case and the decision for a inaction – not reporting sexual harassment episodes – denotes that employees feared retaliation (*freedom from fear*) or believed that nothing was going to change, which can be interpreted as a sign of perceived powerlessness.

In Organization B, the *incongruence between collective and individual goals* might have contributed with a lack of trust between coworkers or departments, instigating competition instead of collaboration. Incoherent targets might suggest favoritism, which could explain the feelings mentioned by participants of frustration (Participant #11 and Participant #13), indignation (Participant #12) and hopelessness (Participant #11), and as a result, increase participants’ levels of stress. When there is no sense of respect or equality, there is no *freedom to live in dignity*. The fear of losing a job (*freedom from want*) can explain why some individuals accepted, for a period of time, to work under *unjust or unfavourable conditions of work*.

For the second sub-question, “how do different individuals feel, interpret and react to the same dilemmas in the same work environment?”, I investigated individuals from the same organization experiencing the same workplace tensions at the same time. The wide range of feelings, rationalizations and practices suggests that the interpretation of threat is individual and subjective, which is corroborated by previous research (Gómez and Gasper, 2022, p.36).

The third sub-question of this research paper was “what are the practices of ascertaining human security by individuals under perceived organizational threats?” Responses given by participants indicated that *collaboration* can be one important alternative. For example, Participant #1 mentioned that he used to collaborate with colleagues to generate goodwill, while Participant #5 aimed to be “attractive” in his targets, meaning that he tried to link his targets to theirs, in order to engage them. Participant #3 voluntarily participated in taskforce teams to work collectively in issues that went beyond her own team and department. This strategy of *collaboration* resonates with the UNDP’s solidarity strategies, deemed as crucial to enhance human security (UNDP, 2022, p. 7).

Another practice of ascertaining human security adopted by several participants was *dialogue*. Participant #4 mentioned that he used to communicate the pros and cons of each alternative and invite his interlocutor to participate in the decision-making process. He also mentioned that he tried to negotiate and to “meet them in the middle”, strategy also adopted by Participant #11, from Organization B. Participant #8 explained she “generated trust as enabler”, which echoes with the UNDP’s report that points out trust as a pre-condition to participation and collaboration (UNDP, 2022, p.37).

Theoretically, the variety of practices adopted by participants when faced with ethical dilemmas suggests that personal agency is strongly present. However, in practice, participants found themselves caught between what they believed were the only options available to them, and thus limited in their agency to the choices they felt existed, often resulting in a degree of personal psychological harm. The resulting job insecurity and vulnerability could indicate that they did not experiment *freedom from want*. Lastly, being morally or sexually harassed, bullied or oppressed is a clear sign of disrespect towards people, evidence that they also have not experimented *freedom to live in dignity*.

The choice of not speaking up or leave the organization which harmed their dignity could be explained by the imbalance of power between the organization and its employees. Those who do not possess capital are forced to sell their labor to earn a living. Sacrificing personal wellbeing, although not ideal, may be the only short-term alternative individuals who depend on their paycheck have. Future research could investigate how the economic levels of

employees correlate with their actions when faced with ethical dilemmas. It's possible that financially at-risk individuals are more likely to comply with the demands of their organization regardless of the ethics of the activity, simply given their vulnerability. Then again, this research indicates that even those who are more financially secure suffer emotional distress when confronted with ethical dilemmas.

Individuals are linked to their organizational in several dimensions beyond financial. Ultimately, employees faced ethical dilemmas and had to decide whether they would report inappropriate behaviors, sexual and moral harassment and even ethnic prejudice. Such episodes are strong, traumatic and possibly even criminal depending on the country. But if retaliation is almost certain, how to report malpractices? How does one make the right decision if “the rope always bursts on the weaker side”? (Participant #8)

One could argue that the combined reports provide a disbelief in the meritocracy or an eventual irreconcilability between correctness and performance, but I do not claim that. It's important to note that this research investigated how some – not all – individuals experienced what they perceived as ethical dilemmas in two particular organizations at a specific period of time. Organizations are like living organisms, evolving all the time and this research is not a reflection of an invariable truth. Rather, I claim that these dilemmas were real for some people during that time. For these set of participants and in their specific contexts, the ethical dilemmas each participant faced triggered a wide range of affects and practices.

Participants recognize that exceptions should not be treated as a rule and consider that their overall experience working at Organization A was more positive than negative. Participant #1, who was fired after having suffered moral harassment from his leader, said that “the last year did not erase the amazing years I had before”. Participant #9 told me that, from the hundreds of persons he had worked with along the years, he would not like to meet again only two, implying that deviations are exceptions, not a rule.

No interviewee mentioned the term “toxic” during the data generation. On the one hand, this could mean that they interpreted misbehaviors as isolated deviations, more linked to an individuals' character than the organizational culture itself. On the other hand, it could sign hopelessness about that particular organization (or organizations in general), inability to detect toxicity (Appelbaum and Roy-Girard, 2007) or even an emotional numbness in dealing with ethical dilemmas.

Signs of individual hopelessness towards their organization permeated through several statements. Participant #1 said, in a literal translation, “this is the way the band plays”, inferring that individuals must adapt, dance according to the music the organization is playing. This

saying is similar to the famous “it is what it is”, which implies that nothing individuals can do would solve the root of the dilemma, it merely helps them better cope with it. Participant #11 used another analogy to convey the same message: “this is the game”, meaning individuals have to play it, whether they like it or not.

One common rational shared by participants, particularly from Organization A was the need to “adequate” or “adapt” to “survive” and thrive at that working environment. “You have to mold yourself to be promoted”, said Participant #2. Participant #10 expressed the same belief: “you need to interpret a character to survive, what matters is what you seems to be, not what you are. You need to play the game, hard work is not enough”. A third participant mentioned the necessity to “wear a mask” to thrive in the workplace.

In their book “The Myth of Normal: trauma, illness & healing in a toxic culture”, the authors convey the definition of trauma by explaining that “trauma is not what happens to you but what happens inside of you” (Maté and Maté, 2022, p.20). Individuals exposed to toxic work environments may have to suppress their feelings and opinions to perform according to expectations or, they “wear a mask” to pretend to be someone else. Similarly, Maté and Maté argue that “trauma entails a disconnection from the self” (2022, p.32) and “separates us from our bodies” (*Ibid.*, p.25). Hence, it is no exaggeration to say that toxic work environments produce organizational traumas on a large scale, stripping individuals from their own identities.

The same authors argue that traumas that occurred during childhood can persist through to adulthood (Maté and Maté, 2022, p.34). In spite of what Participant #13 says about organizations being parental, one could say it is in part the duty of organization leaders to be a role model for younger employees, guiding and nurturing them, similar to what parents do to their children. If this is true, bad leadership can generate trauma in the same way bad parenthood can generate trauma. Participant #5 resonated with this idea when he commented that “leadership is like paternity, you inspire by giving examples”.

The great majority of individuals contacted agreed to participate in the interviews, given their anonymity was granted. Nevertheless, absences must be acknowledged, since they may provide important hints on topics of interest. Two individuals still working for Organization A and currently occupying a high degree in the hierarchical pyramid, did not participate in this study even after having confirmed they would. One of them mentioned that they were “too busy” and the other simply stopped answering my messages. It is possible that the workload is so high for their level that they could not afford to provide one hour of their time or that they did not see any benefit in participating in the study for themselves or for their organizations.

But it is also possible that, on a second thought, they felt uncomfortable sharing their experiences or possibly exposing some of the dilemmas in the organization they co-lead.

Five participants are still working for one of the two organizations, but out of the remaining eight, seven of them reported having felt, at some point, undervalued by their managers or by their organizations. This could suggest that toxic work environments contribute to the feeling of detachment from work (Collins, 2022) and possibly to work related phenomena as Great Resignation and Quiet Quitting (Lee *et al.*, 2023, p.2).

The presence of individual ethical dilemmas in both organizations suggests that the *promotion from within* policy does not play a significant role in the nature or the intensity of dilemmas. However, it remains inconclusive if such policy contributes to unhealthy competition levels or if the strong culture poses a particular harm to employees' identity.

Finally, findings from this study help to explain how affect, practices and ethical dilemmas interact at the individual level and, as a result, how diverse individuals experience ethical dilemmas in the workplace. First, each individual has different beliefs and values that sometimes conflict with collective values prioritized by their organization. When faced with ethical dilemmas, employees display a plurality of emotions and rationalizations and these feelings and beliefs play a role in their responses. Sometimes ethical dilemmas and affects trigger specific actions and other times, conscious inactions. The variety of affects and practices may suggest that individuals have options, but imbalance of power inside the organizations, fear of losing job, lack of frame of justice or lack of organizational support imply that employees are often forced to choose between limited, and often unsatisfactory alternatives, which either harm their dignity or activate their fear of losing the job. As a result, employees struggle to reconcile their *freedom from want* with their *freedom to live in dignity*. Those few who challenge their organization and try to change the *status quo*, are haunted by the fear of reprisals, which compromises their *freedom from fear*.

8. Concluding Remarks

The role of work in ascertaining human security cannot be underestimated. While the absence of work can lead to serious deprivations and trigger a *fear from want*, adverse conditions of work can foment mental and physical violence, compromising *freedom from fear* and threatening employees' dignity – hence, their *freedom to live in dignity* (Gasper, 2022; Gómez and Gasper, 2022; UNDP, 2022).

To enhance human security in the context of employment, assuring *decent work and just and favourable conditions of work* (UDHR, 2021, p.6, emphasis added) is a *sine qua non* condition. Notwithstanding, considering the subjectivity of this task (Gómez and Gasper, 2022, p.39), it is important to take into account the perspectives of employees, frequently marginalized by their employers.

This research paper examined common ethical dilemmas faced by employees from two high-performance companies in Brazil and using human security lenses, identified associated affects (feelings and rationalizations) and practices (actions and inactions). First, I differentiated individual ethical dilemmas from non-ethical dilemmas, then I explored the variety of affects and practices for each ethical dilemma individuals faced. Lastly, I linked these ethical dilemmas to threats to human security.

The principal discovery discerned through this investigation resides in the ubiquity of ethical dilemmas encountered by individuals within their work environments, notably in instances where organizational safeguards are lacking or where an emphasis on profitability and other performance metrics supersedes the prioritization of employee well-being.

Another important finding is that different individuals can experience ethical dilemmas differently, through diverse feelings, rationalizations and practices. In some cases, what configures an ethical dilemma for an employee, it is not for another employee – that occurs because ethical dilemmas crystalize conflicts of values between individuals and their organization and individual values differ from a person to another.

Individual values and beliefs are also shaped by context and this can explain why individuals from one organization encountered particular types of ethical dilemmas, were employees from a different organization faced other types of ethical dilemmas.

Ethical dilemmas, regardless of their type, usually threaten one or more aspects of human security. Employees live fear of losing the job (*freedom from want*), fear of reprisals (*freedom from fear*) or harms to their mental health, security, dignity or well-being (*freedom to live in dignity*). To ascertaining human security, individuals could try to collaborate more and improve dialogue with their leaders and peers.

There are several limitations in this study. First, they are too context specific and, by research design, are not meant to be generalized. Second, findings relied on narratives and the fallibility of the human memory could have impacted the recollection of facts. Third, what individuals externalized can be different from their practices. In this sense, a participatory or ethnographic method could have improved the internal validity of this study.

Organizations experience fluctuations between growth and stagnation and it is reasonable to assume that pressure levels for performance change according to the business cycle. Observations made by participants about the lower level of pressure and lower pace of growth in the last years comparing to previous ones might inspire researchers to investigate how ethical dilemmas are experienced differently according to business cycles.

This research was conducted focusing on lived experiences of employees from companies of a particular kind: *high-performance* organizations. Future research could investigate whether employees from public sector organizations or NGOs face the same types of ethical dilemmas or, alternatively, examine ethical dilemmas lived by individuals from *non* high-performance companies.

Previous research has shown that bullying in the workplace strips agency away from individuals (Sercombe and Donnelly, 2013, p.499) and if one assumes that moral and sexual harassment, discrimination and oppression happen more in unprotected, toxic workplaces, it is logical to presume toxic workplaces also strip agency away from employees. Further empirical research could try to validate this hypothesis.

Despite of all its limitations, this research is one of the few to investigate threats to human security in the workplace through employee's lived experiences. It offered a theoretical framework to explain how competing demands at the organizational level may translate into individual dilemmas, provided a criterion to recognize ethical dilemmas, coded typical ethical dilemmas, examined the variation of individual affects and practices triggered by such conundrum and linked ethical dilemmas in the workplace with threats to human security.

As stated before, for this research paper, any lack of human security is toxic. Like a cancer, toxicity can stay undetected while it spreads throughout the organizations. However, given the widespread unhappiness with work, I postulate that many individuals are aware of such threats, but they may lack options or power to change their situation. Policy makers could play an important role in reducing toxicity: frequent, independent and unexpected audits of conditions of work, where employees are heard and organizations and their leaders are punished could disincentivize bad behaviour. In addition, extending the social safety net and granting a decent income for unemployed people would make them less vulnerable to toxic workplaces.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Ethical Form for RP

In their book, *In Interviews : learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing*, Kvale and Brinkmann (2015) suggested a set of 16 ethical questions (p.68-69) to be answered at the start of an interview study. For my research, I have adopted their protocol and reflected on the questions proposed prior to interviewing participants. I share below this “ethical exercise”:

Q1. What are the beneficial consequences of the study?

By investigating how organizational members interpret and react to competing demands, this study can contribute to paradox theory and institutional complexity literatures. Many scholars have identified that organizations face antagonistic, perhaps irreconcilable demands. One of them is the dichotomy between *focused on results* and *focused on learning*.

Researchers suggest that competing demands like those could raise employees’ stress, reducing engagement, productivity and retention. A poor organizational environment also can affect employee’s wellbeing, sense of belongingness and self realization. In extreme cases, “toxic” organizational environments can lead to workplace incivility – bullying, verbal and physical aggression.

Although organizational studies literature recognizes the importance of “healthy” workplace environments and the positive impact of some kinds of leadership, fewer studies have focused on employee experience, even less using an interpretive approach. I argue that organizations play an important role in the societal well-being, and if we want a more tolerant society, open and willing to appreciate multiple perspectives, we should foster pluralistic, intellectually-humble workplaces.

I hope this research at least shed light on how evaluation methods can influence individual behavior and how coherent with organization priorities those metrics are, according to the employees. Another potential benefit this research can generate is indicating some organizational practices that can stimulate IH behavior, which contributes to both individual and organizational learning and to tolerance. As a result, such practices could play a role in employee’s satisfaction and consequently, increasing productivity and/or reducing turnover.

Q2. How can the study contribute to enhancing the situation of the participating subjects? Of the group they represent? Of the human condition?

The former employees interviewed could reflect on their previous learning and to what extent they could reapply it in other organizations. They may also conjecture about why they have interpreted and react to particular situations, opening a possibility for a new learning experience. They could compare the organizational environment from the studied to the most recent organizations and realize how adaptable and capable they are to thrive in different workplaces.

For current employees, they can appreciate how pluralist and IH friendly is their environment, a workplace where they can excel professionally and at the same time fulfil their learning goals. This can potentially renew their sense of self-realization. They also may appreciate the fact they work for an organization which is coherent, has clear targets and priorities, which reduces stress and promote their well-being.

Q3. How can the informed consent of the participating subjects be obtained?

Interviewees have been previously invited via email or WhatsApp message and agreed to participate in the research. Before start recording the interviews, I will once again as for their verbal consent and reinforce the nature of voluntary participation, the right to abstain from answering any question they feel uncomfortable and even drop the interview process at any moment.

Q4. How much information about the study needs to be given in advance, and what can wait until a debriefing after the interviews?

As I am particularly interested in understanding possible conflicts between *focused on results* measures versus *learning-oriented* values, I am inviting participants for a research on “how people learn in organizations and how they deal with multiple priorities”.

However, I am willing to avoid my confirmation biases and observe any kind of interrelation between organizational competing demands and individual coping mechanisms. During the interviews, if stronger inconsistencies emerge, I will explore them. After the interviews, I will thank the participants for their time and commit to share my final research paper with them.

Q5. Who should give the consent- the subjects or their superiors?

In this case, as my research does not involve any vulnerable group, the subjects themselves will give their consent.

Q6. How can the confidentiality of the interview subjects be protected?

Although interviews will be conducted via Skype video, I will proceed only with audio recording to protect participants anonymity. I will use field notes for registering visual cues and body language, but video will not be recorded. Additionally, participants will be given pseudonyms, common Brazilian names, that will reveal not more than their gender.

Q7. How important is it that the subjects remain anonymous?

The anonymity may enable participants to speak honestly and frankly about their experiences. This is particularly important for the current employees interviews, as the concern of any negative consequence of their participation may distort their real opinion.

Q8. How can the identity of the subjects be disguised?

As mentioned previously, no video recordings and adoption of pseudonym will protect subjects identity. After audio transcription, code and analysis, audio recordings will be deleted.

Q9. Who will have access to the interviews?

Only the researcher and his supervisor will have access to the interviews.

Q10. Can legal problems concerning protection of the subjects' anonymity be expected?

No legal problems expected, since the research is being conducting following state-of-the-art ethical protocol.

Q11. What are the consequences of the study for the participating subjects?

At individual level, the study will not have considerable consequences to participants. The objective of this research is to contribute to tolerant, learning and IH-friendly workplaces in an aggregate level (organizations).

Q12. Will any potential harm to the subjects be outweighed by potential benefits?

No. In extreme cases, a particular participant may eventually feel unhappy when comparing his current organizational environment. However, the potential benefits previously listed outweighed any potential harm.

Q13. Will the interviews approximate therapeutic relationships, and if so, what precautions can be taken?

No, the interviews will approach with interpretivist methodology. There will be no judgment, only acknowledgement of the experiences each participant had and how they feel and react to them. In this pluralist view, there is no “right” answer, every position is valid and valued by its uniqueness.

Q14. When publishing the study, what consequences may be anticipated for the subjects and for the groups they represent?

Subjects should not be surprised since their anonymity will be assured and the pluralist view will shed light on different, not necessarily converging, opinions. For organizations, the limited scope of the investigation should not harm them, since organizational environments are also unique.

Q15. How will the researcher's role affect the study?

As mentioned in section 1.8 (Positionality), my previous experience in the organizational environment studied was critical to generate the questions and to provide access to participants and documents. My current role as researcher and the ten-year period of my experience in that workplace provide me the adequate balance between *stranger-ness* (time and place distance from observer to subject) and familiarity.

Q16. How can a researcher avoid co-option from the funding of a project or overidentification with his or her subjects, thereby losing critical perspective on the knowledge produced?

This research is not being funded by any organization and it's part of my Masters' degree, which was mostly self-funded. The smaller percentage of my MA sponsored by Organization of Americas (OAS) – 40% - does not compromise the topic or methodology of this study. All decisions regarding the study were made by myself, supported by supervisor and following International Social Studies' guidelines and ethical protocols.

Appendix 2 - Questionnaire for RP

- 1. What was the hierarchical level of your current or last position in the company?**
- 2. What were your expectations or motivations when joining this organization?**
- 3. To what extent were these expectations met, exceeded, or not met?**
- 4. What practices did you observe or used to observe in your work environment that you value the most?**
- 5. What kinds of dilemmas or conflicting objectives have you experienced?**
- 6. How did you feel when faced with these dilemmas?**
- 7. What did you do about it?**
- 8. How could this dilemma be resolved?**
- 9. Some conflicts may arise in goal-setting or during evaluations. Looking primarily at your last evaluation, how fair and consistent do you believe it was?**
- 10. What would you change regarding the evaluation methods?**
- 11. Why?**
- 12. Can you think of an example where you had a different perspective on a situation?**
- 13. How did you feel expressing a divergent point of view?**
- 14. Would you say that this organization actively seeks divergent viewpoints?**
- 15. Was there a situation where you felt you had to compromise your values because they conflicted with what you were asked to do?**
- 16. How did you feel?**
- 17. What did you do?**
- 18. It's natural that with so much time in the company, we may occasionally fail to meet some goals. How did you feel when you didn't meet expectations?**

- 19. What did you do when the results were not delivered or when you realized they wouldn't be?**
- 20. What are the most important things you have learned in this organization? They can be formal or informal...**
- 21. How much do you believe the "promote from within" policy impacted your development and learning?**
- 22. Have you experienced or witnessed any inappropriate behavior?**
- 23. How did you feel about the inappropriate behavior?**
- 24. How did you react to inappropriate behavior?**
- 25. What processes could be reinforced or implemented to minimize inappropriate behaviors?**
- 26. In your opinion, what is necessary to succeed in this organization? (Exploring the dichotomy between expertise and learning and how this perceived priority is reconciled or not with evaluation methods.)**
- 27. Finally, tell me a bit about how your departure process was. What motivated the decision? Or what motivates you to stay with the company?**

Appendix 3 – Guidelines for Virtual Interviews

In their article, “*It’s More Complicated Than It Seems: Virtual Qualitative Research in the COVID-19 Era.*” , Roberts, Pavlakis and Richards (2021) provided a tool “intended for researchers to spur conversations and support decision-making around virtual qualitative research” (p.10). This next section engages with the checklist proposed by the authors in the Appendix “Qualitative Research as a Virtual Enterprise: Considerations for Research Design and Execution” that extends their article.

1. Ensuring Methodological Rigor Appropriateness of virtual format

Is the safety of participants, communities, and/or researchers a concern?

No, there are no considerable risks for any participant of this study, as well as for the researcher.

Do timelines, deadlines, funding, or personal responsibilities necessitate a transition?

Ideally the interviews would be done in person, but budget restrictions led to the second-best alternative, online video interviews. This required smaller adaptations in the timeline, but I feel confident that I will deliver the research paper in the original deadline.

Does a virtual format necessitate any changes to the purpose of my study and/or research questions?

No, the interpretive method was chosen due to the nature of the research question and, in order to answer it, the best method to generate findings are interviews. The only adaptation needed was to conduct them online vs in-person.

What may be lost by a virtual format (e.g., richer understanding of context; rapport with participants; access to marginalized populations)?

Physical interviews with current organization employees could benefit from better understanding of *current* context, but should not impact in the case of former employees, since I have experienced myself the workplace. The absence of a second

researcher to take field notes during interviews is not ideal but will be mitigated through audio recording. In this sense, I can focus on body language and visual cues and proceed with note taking, since I will have more time later to analyze audio recordings.

2. Technological considerations.

What technology is appropriate for my study (i.e., videoconferencing platforms, survey software, recording tools, other)? Does it present any additional costs? Do I need assistance with technology before or during data collection?

Videoconferencing platforms as Skype, Google Meet or Microsoft Teams will be adequate to conduct the interviews. Smartphone recording app and Atlas.ti software, with license provided by ISS will be the other used tools. None of them present additional costs. Finally, I do not need assistance with technology since I have previous experience with all mentioned tools.

What barriers might participants face in using my choice of technologies (e.g., digital literacy; special needs or (dis)abilities; lack of accounts/email, devices, connectivity, or private space)?

Since all participants have previous experience using videoconferencing platforms, none of them will be excluded and it's expected they won't need any help to enter the link provided for the interview.

How will I record interviews (audio, video, both)? Should I use a back-up?

I will record audio only to protect individuals anonymity and take notes during the interviews. A second cell phone will be used as backup for recording.

Recruitment of participants. How can I recruit participants with differing levels of technological proficiency?

Not applicable. I am very confident that all participants are technological proficiency since they use or have used them in their jobs.

How can I foster rapport with individuals and institutions virtually, to recruit study sites, build relationships with individuals, or aid in access to other participants?

My previous experience as employee of the studied organization grant me access to documents and former and current employees.

3. Researcher positionality.

How can I develop a rich understanding of the context of my study without being physically present in my research site?

Again, my previous experience provided me a deeper understanding of the context.

4. Ethics and Equity Obtaining consent.

How can I obtain consent in a way that allows a two-way conversation between the researcher and participant?

I will obtain their verbal consent at the start of the virtual interview. However, all participants invited have already agreed to participate and were shortly briefed about the research objective.

5. Access and equity.

How does a virtual format constrain or expand access to individuals/subgroups of interest? Do a lack of devices, connectivity, and/or limited digital literacy complicate access?

No, all participants have connectivity and are digitally literate.

Does the opportunity to conduct research virtually permit access to participants that may have been inaccessible in person (e.g., rural or other remote populations, participants with limited mobility)?

Yes, but due to budget constraints, not to participants situation. All of them live in non-remote areas and have no limited mobility.

6. Risk.

How does a virtual format affect risks to participants?

I will mitigate risks to participants' anonymity, confidentiality and data privacy by ensuring that participants are in a private space, allowing virtual backgrounds, securely storing electronic participant data/audio files, only recording audio and referring to participant by participant-chosen pseudonym while recording.

7. Timeliness.

How will adopting a virtual approach affect my study timeline?

It will not affect the timeline.

Will I need to amend an existing IRB? Do I need to extend my timeline to allow for any in-person data collection that is not feasible virtually? Does the urgency of my topic suggest alternative pathways for dissemination of my findings?

No, not applicable.

Appendix 4 - Questionnaire for RP (in Portuguese)

- 1) Pesquisa eh confidencial e anonima, nem seu nome nem o nome da companhia sera divulgado.
- 2) A participacao eh voluntaria e voce tem o direito de nao responder qualquer pergunta que sinta como indelicada e também eh seu direito deixar a entrevista a qualquer momento.
- 3) Peco licenca para tomar notas durante a conversa e peço sua autorizacao formal pra grava-la para posteriormente poder transcrever a analisar.
- 4) A duracao eh de aproximadamente uma hora, se precisar sair antes disso, eh so me avisar que interrompemos.
- 5) Obrigado por sua participacao. Reforco que meu metodo de entrevista considera a experiencia de cada pessoa valida. Nao existe certo ou errado, eh o seu ponto de vista.

Perguntas para todos os participantes:

- 1) Para comecar, me fale quando voce ingressou nessa companhia e por quantos anos voce trabalha ou trabalhou nela? Em que ano voce ingressou? *(caso tenha saído por um periodo, entender quando regressou e se observou alguma diferenca)*
- 2) Como voce descreveria sua experiencia trabalhando nessa organizacao? Quais sao as praticas que voce observa ou observava no seu ambiente de trabalho que voce valoriza mais? *(Atencao para palavras-chave como “aprendizagem”, “desenvolvimento” or conceitos relacionados a humildade intelectual como “mente aberta”, “curiosidade” ou termos que sinalizam ambientes de trabalho nao toxico como “respeito” e “tolerancia”*
- 3) Voce acredita que o ambiente organizacional tem ou teve alguma influencia no seu comportamento individual? Se sim, como? Se nao, por que nao? *(Explorando como praticas organizacionais influenciam individuos, de acordo com eles mesmos)*
- 4) E o contrario? Voce acredita que voce influencia ou influenciava seu ambiente organizacional? Se sim, como? Se nao, por que? *(Explorar como individuos percebem sua “agencia” e responsabilidade pelo ambiente que eles estão. Palavras-chave: “lideranca”, “protagonismo” e “accountability”*
- 5) Como voce e ou era avaliado? No seu ponto de vista, o que e necessario para vencer nessa organizacao? *(Atencao para observar se participantes respondem aspectos relacionados*

a aprendizagem e ou comportamento, por exemplo como os resultados são atingidos ao invés de apenas os resultados atingidos.)

6) Você acredita que os métodos de avaliação são justos? Eles são consistentes com o que a organização espera de você? Se você pudesse, mudaria algo em relação aos critérios de avaliação? *(Explorando eventuais inconsistências nos métodos de avaliação)*

7) Você acha que as pessoas nesta organização têm espaço para expressar suas ideias? Se sim, você acredita que eles se sintam ouvidos? Nesta companhia as pessoas buscam pontos de vista divergentes? Se sim, poderia me dar um exemplo? *(Explorando tolerância, honestidade, maturidade... sinais de que o ambiente é amigável a IH)*

8) Você vivenciou múltiplas prioridades ou demandas nesta organização? Se sim, qual foi a situação e como você lidou com ela? *(demandas conflitantes? Se sim, elas foram reconciliadas pelos membros da organização?)*

9) Durante este período em que trabalhou na organização, você deixou de atingir metas? Quais os processos que existem para melhoria de performance? Como você se sentiu durante esse processo? *(explorando tolerância ao erro na organização e a mentalidade de crescimento no indivíduo)*

10) Este ambiente organizacional oferece oportunidades formais e informais para aprendizagem? Se sim, quais as coisas mais importantes que você aprendeu? *(learning organization? Observar se participantes mencionam programas de treinamentos formais liderados por RH, aprendizagem com os líderes ou com os pares e auto-aprendizagem)*

11) Esta companhia tinha uma política de “promover de dentro”. Aparentemente isso mudou porque posições intermediárias foram anunciadas em plataformas como LinkedIn. Você acha que isto afeta você de alguma maneira? E quanto à sua organização? *(checando se aprendizagem era o foco devido à estratégia de promover de dentro e entender como isso mudou, se e que mudou)*

12) Você diria que essa organização prioriza Performance ou aprendizagem? É melhor ser expert ou aprendiz? *(explorando a dicotomia entre expertise e aprendizagem e como esta prioridade percebida é reconciliada ou não, com os métodos de avaliação)*

13) Você vivenciou ou testemunhou algum comportamento inapropriado? O que você sentiu e como você reagiu a ele? Quais processos existem para minimizar comportamentos inapropriados? *(observando ambiente de trabalho tóxico, estilos de liderança e processos)*

14) De onde voce esta agora, quais foram as mudancas organizacionais que voce observou na companhia, comparando com o que voce experimentou no passado? Como essas mudancas te afetam? *(particularmente interessante pra aqueles com muitos anos de companhia en para aqueles que sairam e voltaram depois).*

15) Pra terminar, me conte um pouco sobre como foi o processo de sua saida? O que motivou a decisao?