

Controle e valorização da liberdade de expressão no mundo do trabalho

Control and enhancement of freedom of expression in the world of work¹

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Resumo: Neste artigo, apresentamos resultados de pesquisa realizada com trabalhadores de sete organizações, com objetivo de identificar como a liberdade de expressão é significada e vivenciada em ambientes de trabalho. Nesse sentido, utilizaremos como aportes teóricos o binômio comunicação e trabalho, e os estudos ergológicos. Os dados foram coletados por meio de questionários e mostram que as organizações conferem parâmetros para a liberdade de expressão. O direito à liberdade de expressão é reconhecido e valorizado, porém os limites se inserem em contextos nos quais os trabalhadores têm pouca margem para estabelecê-los. As preocupações com danos à empresa e a manutenção da boa convivência são as principais razões apontadas para a necessidade de limites. Possíveis riscos à segurança e danos à imagem tanto de trabalhadores quanto das organizações se difundem como consequências de uma expressão livre.

Palavras-chave: Liberdade de expressão; comunicação e trabalho; direitos humanos.

Abstract: In this article, we present results of research carried out with workers from seven organizations, aiming to identify how freedom of expression is signified

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and experienced in work environments. In this sense, we use as theoretical contributions the binomial communication and work and ergological studies. The data were collected through questionnaires and showed that the organizations confer parameters for freedom of expression. The right to freedom of expression is recognized and valued, but the limits are embedded in contexts in which workers have little scope to establish them. Concerns about damage to the company and the maintenance of good living together are the main reasons for the need of limits. Possible security risks and damage to the image of both workers and organizations spread as a consequence of a free expression.

Keywords: *Freedom of expression; communication and work; human rights.*

Introduction

Researches on freedom of expression pay tribute to a long tradition of reflection performed under the dominions of philosophy and legal studies, that end up establishing the parameters for the fixation of this right in the legal order and for the judgement of conflicts coming from the collision of fundamental rights in societies defined by the model of liberal democracy (FARIAS, 2008; MELLO, 2015; GIRARD, 2016), principle to be valued in liberal democratic societies, inserting themselves in a discursive memory that takes back the conquests of European modernity. In the Brazilian case, given the difficulty of consolidating the democratic ideology, researches about freedom of expression are also marked by the reflection on censorship (CARNEIRO, 2002; COSTA, 2013; GOMES, 2010; KUSHNIR, 2004) and focus in the observation of the public sphere, especially cultural practices such as arts and communications. However, other sectors of social life, for instance, the world of work and their relations of communication, are erased from this reflection.

This scenario motivated us to create an empirical study of exploratory character with the goal of analyzing how freedom of expression is experienced and signified in the world of work, more precisely in organizational environments, marked by the control of activities, rules, norms and processes. In sum, we seek to understand the meanings and practices of freedom of expression in the tense relationship between individuals and organizations, which have as background the relationship between capital/work, in a contradictory context of development of productive regimens in which predominate the rationalization and competition (ANTUNES, 2011, 2018; HARVEY, 2008) at the same time they value autonomy, flexibility and freedom (BOLTANSKI; CHIAPELLO, 2009; LINHART, 2007). Therefore, we question ourselves about the factors that determine the experience of freedom of expression in work contexts, considered as spaces of cultural mediation and that relations of communication can be established. In this article, we discussed, based on the binomial communication and work (FIGARO, 2009) and ergologic studies (SCHWARTZ, 2000), results obtained through a questionnaire

answered by 365 workers from seven organizations⁴ who composed the quantitative stage of our research, whose theoretical background and methodology used are described in the next section. This research was finalized in 2018 and the results have been shared in events and scientific articles (PACHI FILHO, 2017; 2018). In this article, we highlighted aspects relative to the predominant definition of freedom of expression, regulation of conduct and spaces of expression.

Communication and work

The productive restructuring, which characterizes capitalism since the last decades of the previous century, has imposed significant changes in the insertion of workers in the structure of production and substantially changed the form of being, both in the material and subjective point of view of this group, according to Antunes (2009; 2011) and Linhart (2000; 2007). The creation of new productive models, essential for the maintenance of capitalism, should approximate the wishes for bigger flexibility and freedom, chanted in revolutions of workers and students in Europe in the 1960's, as informed by Boltanski and Chiapelo (2009). Personality aspects, cognitive and emotional capabilities become the focus of attention of managers in a context in which experience and qualification lose ground (LINHART, 2007). A model emerges, privileging individualization and waving at the possibility of a realization of subjective potentialities. In this new scenario, they seek to put the worker, as individual, in the center of the productive process. To Linhart (2007), however, the individualization progresses in great strides and in the same rhythm of the contradictions derived from productive logics.

With these changes, that are not constituted in a new model of organization of society, the worker continues to be subordinated to the productive system and to the business universe. As a result of the logic of capital, such as approached by Antunes (2011, p. 47), we have visible

4 Companies of the following sectors took part in this research: Electric, Advertisement, Human Resources, Transportation, Information Technology, Teaching Organization and Organization of Education, Culture and Leisure.

effects on how the expansion of the structural unemployment, the reduction of industrial and factory work, a raise of the sub-proletariat and precarious work.

Another consequence of this process was the expansion of the part of work related to language, as explained by Boutet (2016). Communication takes on a decisive role for the new symbolic management demanded in organizational contexts. Therefore, it is necessary to think about the articulations between language, communicational practices and places of mediation of discourses present in society, among them the world of work, where also occurs the reprocessing of values (SCHWARTZ, 2000) that sediment society and feed social discourse.

Lacoste (2001) explains that communication at work remains hidden due to the development of business communication, which invests in techniques, discourses, professionalization and contributes to keep in the shadow an older and essential reality, attached to the processes of work. This author affirms that the visions about work developed in the organizations remain dominated by the obsession for technology, automation and the organizational rationalization. In this context, the idea of communication is disturbing is hard to grasp by the practices that rule the corporate world.

When formulating the binomial communication and work, Figaro (2009) promotes the dislocation of communication from the universe of management for the world of work, gesture that allows thinking of it through the varied and non-standard relations of meaning and/or uniform according to the intention of management of this communication. The world of work, according to Figaro's definition (2008a), is a wide category crossed by discourses, values, varied ideologies and different social groups.

The activity of work, explains Figaro (2009) based in Schwartz (2000), allows the subject to create something in benefit to themselves and others through consolidated prescriptions and their personal experience (knowledge invested). The work, in the conception proposed by Schwartz, is the space where the norms are faced with the

subjectivity of the worker. What happens is a constant exchange between formal knowledge and those originated in the practice of workers (SCHWARTZ; DURRIVE, 2010). Therefore, workers make use of their history, their values and use them to execute activities, constantly reinventing the norms prescribed to them. Because of that, Schwartz (2000) forges the concept of body-self to comprise the different experiences and temporalities present in the work activity. The body-self articulates personal, social and cultural history. In the work activity, it is impossible not to make choices according to values, which opens a path for a discussion around freedom – among them, freedom of expression – which enable the choices of body-self (SCHWARTZ; DURRIVE 2010 p. 71). In the ergologic perspective, one must understand that the subject makes use of self for himself in a game with the use that others make of the subject, processes named “dramatics of use of self by oneself and others” (SCHWARTZ; DURRIVE 2010, p. 71).

According to Figaro (2008a), the communication in the world of work happens in the interactions necessary to the work activity and the needs of management of self by oneself and of self by others. It is the category of analysis that reveals reactions and interactions given between subjectivities, a constitutive condition of being human. Therefore, in Figaro’s perspective, work and communication are central in the constitution of social relations, which includes productive processes. The work activity, which depends on human action, is articulated by the activity of communication, in the social work that characterizes the own species. In this sense, work is treated as a space of mediation⁵.

Methodology

The absence of data and studies on the relationship between freedom of expression and the variables present in the world of work motivated us to develop in an empirical and exploratory study in the field of

5 The idea of mediation corresponds to a form of being in reality, that is social, psychological and cultural, that allows human beings to interpret the world through their historic-cultural insertion (BRAGA, 2012, p. 32).

Communication Sciences to understand the circulation of meanings on freedom of speech in organizational contexts, here understood as part of the world of work. The exploratory studies have as goal to prepare the terrain for later researchers or to approach themes that are not as researched, allowing the researcher to familiarize themselves with the issues involving the object of their studies (SAMPIERI; COLLADO; LUCIO, 2006). In the research as a whole, we have adopted Figaro's (2008a, 2008b, 2013) theoretical-methodological propositions. The methodologic outline proposed by this author, adapted to the complexity and interdisciplinarity needed in the objects of study in the field of Communication, includes quantitative and qualitative steps. In this article, we presented partial results obtained for the quantitative stage, which counted with data collection through a questionnaire with workers of seven organizations.

The questionnaire, with 74 questions, used for the collection of data of workers was split into ten blocks: personal information, knowledge on human rights and freedom of expression, regulation of conduct and freedom of expression, spaces of expression, access to media, monitoring and control of media, expression in media, political and union expression and individual expression. Marchesan and Ramos (2012) explain that the questionnaires are instruments developed to collect data that are not readily available and that cannot be obtained through observation. Their goal, as warned by Gil (1999, p. 128), is to get to know, through a fairly elevated number of questions, opinions, beliefs, feelings, interests and situations experienced.

When creating the questionnaire, we sought to apprehend the contemporary meaning of freedom of expression, how it is fixed in the social discourse, through legally established documents, such as the Brazilian Federal Constitution (1988), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), and documents of multilateral institutions, for instance, the Organization of American States (2015), the International Labor Organization (2013), and the United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture (2016). We also sought to explore the meanings

established for freedom of expression in the field of administration, including, as demonstrated by França (2010), questions related to quality of life and participant management, and in documents and business organizations such as Ethos Institute of Business and Social Responsibility (2011). We also adopted the categories proposed by Barry (2007) about freedom of expression in the workplace, comprising freedom of belief, speech, divulgation and association.

In basically qualitative researches, such as the one we performed, the sample is defined as an unit of analysis or a group of people, contexts, events, facts, communities, about which data will be collected without the need of universe or population representation (SAMPIERI; COLLADO; LUCIO, p. 251-252). In this research, we constituted non-probability samples of companies and workers. Therefore, according to Sampieri, Collado and Lúcio (2006, p. 271), the choice of individuals for the composition of non-probability samples depends on the researcher and their advantage for the qualitative studies resides in the fact that they are useful for research templates that do not require representation of elements.

The formation of the first sample, constituted by organizations, was determined by judging, adequate process to choose typical and representative elements in a small number. We wanted to select organizations with a public commitment with human rights. We chose this profile for having adhesion to a business discourse that focuses on citizenship and for supposedly being more permeable to the different meanings of freedom of expression. Out of the 43 companies contacted, 7 agreed participating on the research, through having confidentiality of their data, names, products and identity of their workers. The second sample was composed by workers of these companies. Because we do not have the intention of statistic inference in this moment of research and given the exploratory profile of study, we do not establish criteria for the selection of respondents. In total, 365 workers answered the questionnaire applied in each one of the seven participating organizations of the research, in 2016 and 2017, numbers considered sufficient to identify

standards and trends and to have a general dimension about the themes we approached.

Data were organized into a single base with the use of electronic sheets. Then, the variables were coded and the data was imported into the software Statistical Package for Social Science for Windows (SPSS version 18)⁶ with the intent of having a descriptive statistical analysis, an instrument that allows the elaboration of frequency tables and the understanding of regularities and trends that can be observed in big amounts of data (COOPER; SCHINDLER, 2011).

Right of expression

Freedom of expression⁷ understood as a right to express oneself without discomfort, according to the standards established by law and respecting other rights, is the most adequate definition for this value, according to 62.5% of the respondents (Image 1). Other 24.1% believe that freedom of expression is the right to express oneself without discomfort, respecting the boundaries establishes by laws and institutions, such as companies. Only 13.4% believe that freedom of expression is the right to express oneself without discomfort or boundaries. Nowadays, the debate on these meanings, about expressive behaviors and the coexistence of freedom of expression with other fundamental freedoms and other social interests have been a target of concern of philosophers and lawyers, as demonstrated by Ramond (2016) and by society itself, as we found out on our research. The philosophical and legal delimitation, whose common denominator, according to Girard (2016), can be defined as the right to express oneself without suffering arbitrary interference is

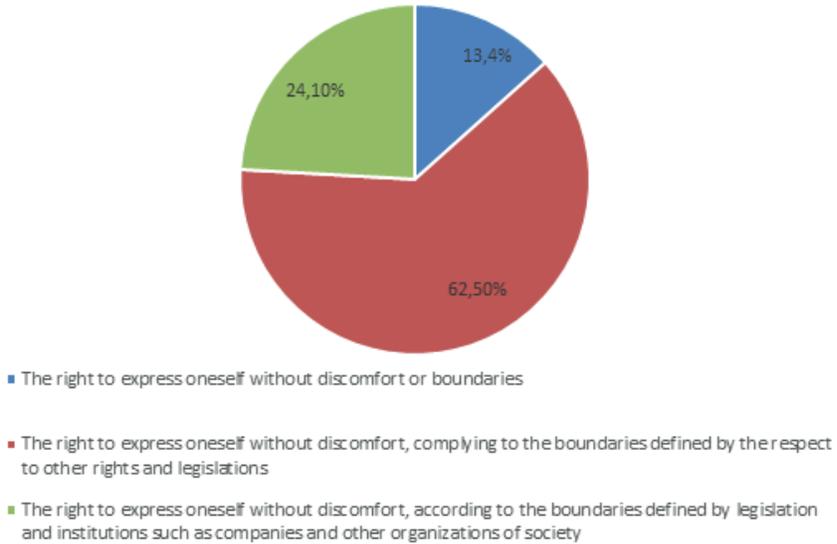
6 The Statistical Package for Social Science for Windows (SPSS) is a software for statistical analysis of data, which enables the realization of complex calculation and the visualization of results in a simple and self-explanatory manner. This software makes a complete initial descriptive analysis of the answers obtained and also of the internal consistency of the questionnaire.

7 In this topic, the analyses were made based on the answers to the following multiple-choice propositions: "Freedom of choice can be defined as" and "Limits to freedom of expression can be defined as".

insufficient to delimitate forms of expression and the criteria to establish arbitrary acts.

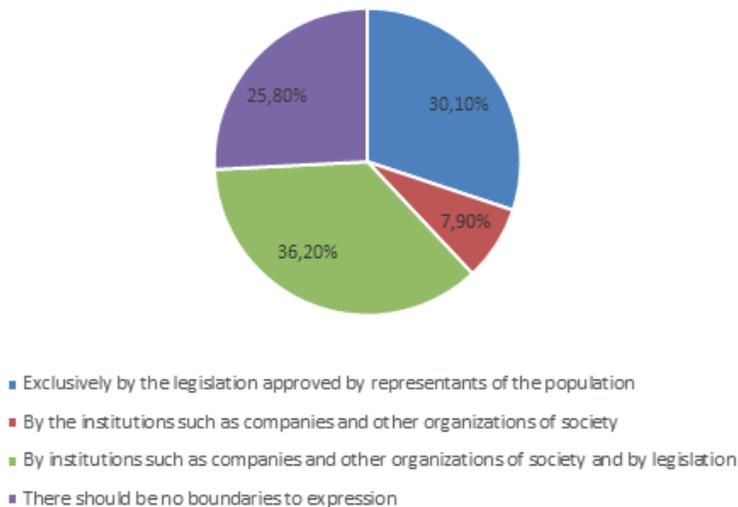
In our research, we could see that law is a dominant parameter for the definition of freedom of expression among workers, however, we cannot disregard the role of institutions, especially concerning the boundaries to this value. When we consider who should establish boundaries for freedom of expression, we see that not only legislation, but institutions have a role admitted as relevant (Image 2). Institutions such as companies and organizations in society and legislation are considered as instances charged of limiting freedom of expression to 36.2% of the respondents. The other 30.1% believe that is the role only for the representatives of the population to establish, through laws, the boundaries to freedom of expression. A significant part (25.8%) believe that it should not exist boundaries to expression. The final 7.9% believe that this is up to institutions of society to establish such boundaries. We can observe that institutions compete with law in the task of limiting freedom of expression, not having a consensus of the exclusive source to that boundaries are established by legal and political action. There is a tendency on behalf of workers to accepting limiting norms of institutional origin, that cannot be undervalued and a distance of the field of politics and rights as primary definers of boundaries for expression. In this aspect, meanings and boundaries for the freedom of expression can also be focused and variable according to the institutional practices, either determined by superior instances or open to worker's participation.

Image 1 - Definition of freedom of expression.



Source Created by the authors.

Image 2 - Definition of boundaries for expression.



Source: Created by the authors.

Regulation of expression

The boundaries for expression in organizations⁸ (Image 3), to which participants of the research work, are, in the most part, defined in an informal manner, as attested by 35.6% of the respondents. Other 26.8% recognize these boundaries are defined in company documents. 18.2% say they do not have limits for expression, and 19.4%, in addition to saying they do not have limits, they feel free to express opinions, criticism and feelings. In summary, most of them recognize the existence of boundaries. From those who recognize the existence of boundaries (62.4 of the sample), 50.4%, however, said they do not know how they are established and other 49.6% said they know how the boundaries are established. We can perceive that the validity of informality does not stop boundaries to be recognized and integrated to work routines. An expressive part of the respondents does not recognize how such boundaries are constituted, which lead us to believe these rules tend to be formulated externally to the groups of work.

The ones who said to know the limits for expression (55.2%) said that the boundaries are established in codes of ethics and committees within the organization. Other 21% said that the boundaries are directly delimited by bosses and 16.4% said the company set boundaries for expression through communication letters. Only 7.4% said the limits are established in open discussions with the participation of employees (Image 4). Therefore, we can observe that among the workers that recognize boundaries there is not the perception of participation of their establishment, being a responsibility of the organization to define them, even if they use mechanisms such as ethics codes and committees. The definition of boundaries through hierarchic superiors or communication letters, whose origin are the instances of direction, is also significant and shows that the boundary of expression, when recognized by workers, occurs in spheres of power that are not accessible to their participation.

8 Analyses created based on answers to the question “In the company where you work, is there boundaries to expression? Do you know how these boundaries are established? Boundaries harm free expression? Do these boundaries harm the work to be done? Are they necessary?”.

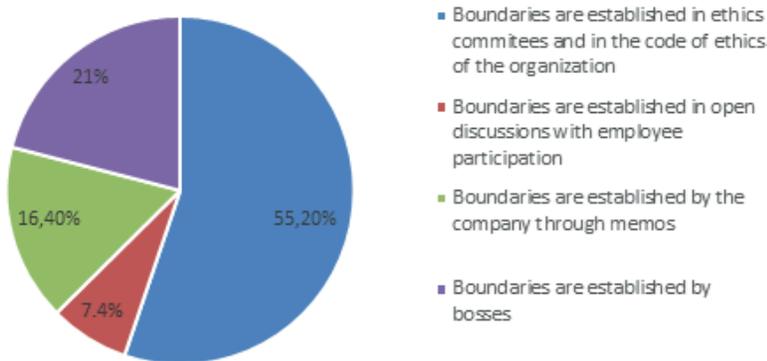
Therefore, the expression of workers seems subject and conditioned to norms of institutional order, which affect communication and circulation of meanings about freedom of expression itself.

Image 3 - Boundaries for expression in the organization.



Source: Created by the author.

Image 4 - How boundaries are established.



Source: Created by the authors.

Still, 62.4% consider that the boundaries do not harm worker's expression and 37.6% said there is harm. About the work activity, 78% consider that the boundaries established do not harm them and other 22% see harm for their work execution. Two hypotheses can be formulated from these data: the limits do not generate real nuisance or were admitted as part of the work process of the ones performing it. In addition to that, 75.9% consider necessary the boundaries to freedom of expression and 24.1% believe these limits are not necessary. Thus, there is a big agreement of workers to the boundaries that were established, becoming, therefore, part of their experience in the work environment. Crystallizing the idea that the boundaries established by the organization are necessary so that work can be done.

In a multiple answer question⁹, we sought to investigate the reasons why boundaries are considered necessary for those who agree with their existence (Image 5). To avoid damage to the image of the organization and maintaining a good work environment was the alternatives that had the biggest amount of answers, followed by items such as the maintenance of confidential information and worker's safety. Free expression, in the view of the respondents that consider these boundaries necessary, is configured as a threat first for the company, which could suffer damage in their image and compromise their safety. In the background, workers could also have a threat in their safety and image. The sociability could also be harmed, and the boundaries adopted by the institution would work to preserve work relationships. Therefore, we perceive the centrality of the organization about the need for limiting expression, which becomes a risk to be considered, fact that has a significant agreement among the respondents of the research.

9 We consider here the total of answers obtained in each item of the answer to the question "Why do you consider these boundaries necessary?" in the set of companies and organizations researched. The same procedure was adopted for the data presented in Images 6, 7 and 8.

Image 5 - Why are boundaries necessary?



Source: Created by the authors.

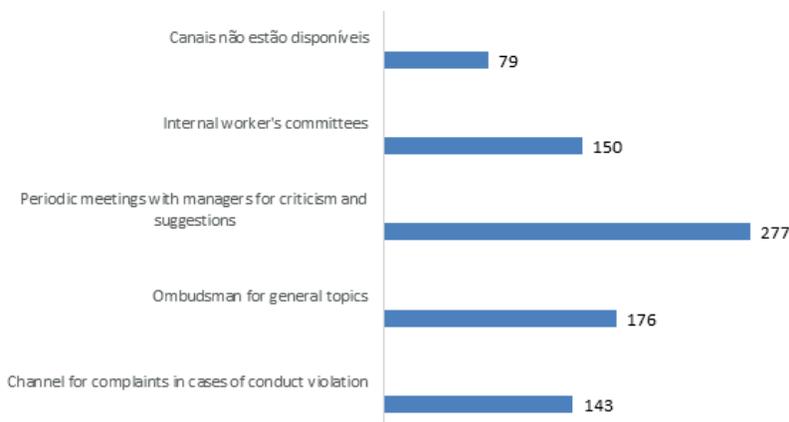
Spaces of expression

A not so expressive part (21.4%) of the respondents says to participate of management committees in the organizations researched¹⁰. The majority (78.6%) keeps a distance in the participation of these committees. Periodic meetings, ombudsman and internal commissions are the most popular channels for worker's expression (Image 6). In this scenario, 67.15% consider the channels available for worker's manifestation, such as ombudsman, channels for complaints, internal meetings and commissions, enough to guarantee freedom of expression. Other 32.85%, in turn, consider these channels insufficient. The majority (80.8%) of the workers feel motivated to give suggestions to improve practices and work conditions, which does not occur in the view of 19.2% of participants of the research. The stimulus to expression with the intention of contribution for the improvement of work processes is one of the characteristics

10 Analyses made based on the answers to the questions: "Do you participate in management committees in the company? Does the company keep channels of expression? Are the channels available enough to guarantee freedom of expression? Do you feel motivated and free to give suggestions to improve work practices and conditions?"

of modern management inspired in the Toyotist model, in which the worker's expression is motivated in a way to involve with the business project and be responsible to the compliance of the established goals. Such spaces are thought to capture worker's expression in benefit of the organization and to decrease the risk derived from conflicts inherent to the capital/work relation (ANTUNES, 2011; LINHART, 2007).

Image 6 - Channels for expression.



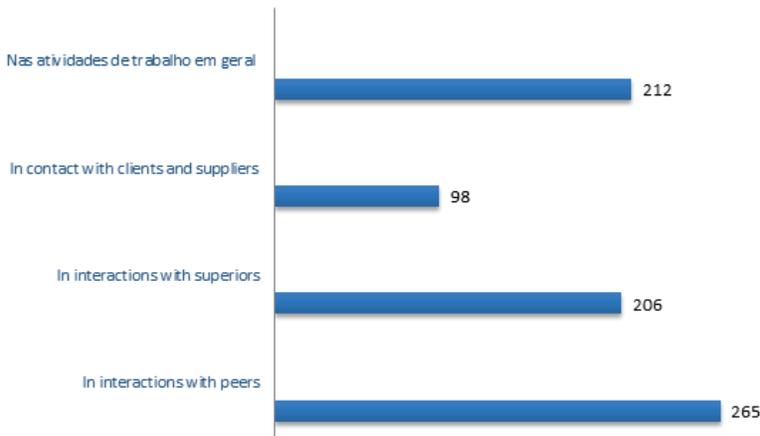
Source: Created by the authors

The situations considered freer (Image 7)¹¹ for the expression are the ones referred to the interaction with work peers, followed by the feeling of being free in work activities, analyzed in a general manner, and with the interaction with hierarchic superiors. The contact with clients and suppliers, people external to the organization, was the item that received the smallest number of answers. The interaction with work colleagues, in which informal bonds are more establish, guarantees a bigger freedom of expression. The interaction with superiors does not seem to impose boundaries to expression. We know that the modern management aims the proximity between leaders and led in the

11 Analysis performed based in the answer to the question: "In which situations do you consider your expression. Is free in the company where you work?" (More than one answer can be checked).

search of establish a relationship based on trust, in which conflicts are solved with dialogue (LINHART, 2007). It is necessary to understand that work groups have variable outlines, as Schwartz (2010b, p. 151) points out. In order to do that, the author formulates the concept of relatively pertinent collective entities. If the work environment are spaces where life is processes, the groups are dynamically constituted and are in a permanent transition. Their borders are defined by the work activity in certain moments, according to the bonds established by workers. It is in the groups where debates of social and political value take place, being reprocessed in the field of work activity. Therefore, what happens in the field of society, when referred to the global management of economic and political activities, produces effects in activities and means of work, where occur the reprocessing of the social debate. As a consequence, there is a connection between the values discussed in the social field and those reprocessed in work, in a way that one interferes on the other.

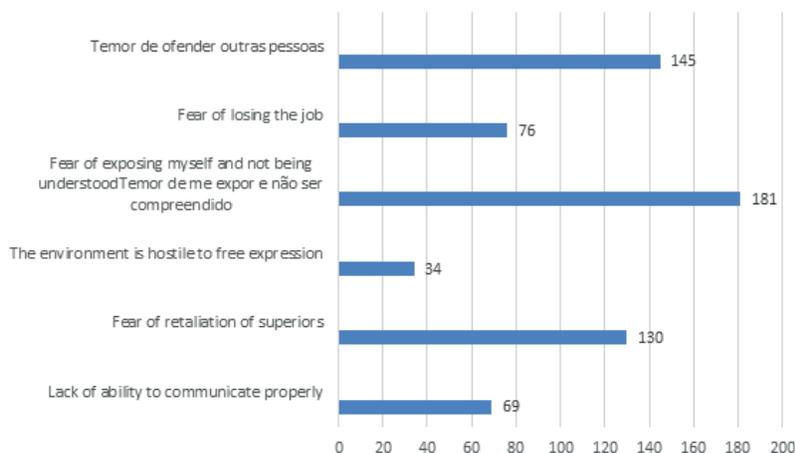
Image 7 - Situations in which expression is free.



Source: Created by the authors.

Generally, we sought to investigate the factors that impede free expression in the organization where the research participants work¹² (Image 8). In response to the question that can be signaled different alternatives, the fear of being exposed and misunderstood is the most popular alternative, followed by the fear of offending people, of suffering retaliation and losing the job. Lack of ability to communicate and hostility in the environment were less mentioned factors. A trace that stands out is the fear that the workers seem to have to express themselves, even if organizations give space for expression. We see that hostility to expression present in the environment wasn't a relevant factor, but one cannot disregard that the fear of retaliation of a superior and losing the job are aspects mentioned, which shows that there are issues in the functioning of organizations that can limit expression.

Image 8 - What constraints free expression.



Final considerations

Concerning workers, the responses obtained point towards an experience to be determined in the work environment and by the organization.

12 Analysis made based on the answers to the question “In your view, what stops your free expression. In the company where you work? (More than one answer can be checked).”

For most of the interviewees, freedom of expression is the right to express themselves without discomfort, according to standards established by law and by the respect to other rights. Therefore, we perceive that freedom of expression is assured by law and its boundaries must be considered only in relation to law and other rights. However, if the question was directed to investigate who should establish boundaries for freedom of expression, we can observe that there is a significant tendency of admitting that other institutions also do it. In this aspect, the acceptance of boundaries, not originated in the political and legal sphere, finds support in the vision of workers, also considering that the minority believes that there should not be boundaries to expression. The prescriptions related to freedom of expression have, consequently, relevance for the relations of communication in the work as rules and boundaries are set in organizations and not only in law, affecting the management that workers do of themselves.

Even if organization seek to formally establish boundaries for expression and use instruments such as codes of conduct and ethics committees, a part of the respondents says that boundaries are set informally. The recognition of the existence of documents that fix boundaries to expression is not, therefore, generalized. It is also possible to say that half of the total of respondents that recognize the existence of boundaries to expression does not know how the boundaries are set, which could indicate that workers' participation in the debate and reflection of freedom of expression is not an existent practice, sufficiently diffused and/or known. Thus, the parameter for freedom of expression is given by the organization, in other words, workers know the restrictions to which they are submitted.

Most workers who identify the formal existence of boundaries to expression say they are defined in codes and ethics committees. Hierarchic superiors and memos are also recognized as sources for the fixation of boundaries to expression. Few workers seem to have discussions on the work groups for discussion on boundaries of expression, which corroborates in our hypothesis that institutions define boundaries in hierarchic

instances and seek to impose them as workers as a norm of conduct to be followed. In this scenario, most of the workers do not seem to bother with boundaries and say that they do not harm performance in work activities. In addition to that, most of them also recognize these boundaries as necessary, a proof that there is acceptance and normalization of these boundaries in practice. The concerns with eventual damages to the company and the maintenance of good interaction are the main reasons pointed towards the need for boundaries. Risks to safety and damages to the image, both of workers and organizations, are diffused as possible negative consequences of a free expression.

Open spaces of expression in the organization for worker manifestation are deemed as sufficient for most of the respondents, which are also considered stimulated to give suggestions and contribute to the improvement of work, a fact that shows an efficient work of the apparatus of capture of expression set in the organizations. However, few of them take part in management committees. The freest situations for expression are those lived with co-workers or with hierarchic superiors, given that they signal for situations of interaction, informality and proximity. Human relations established in the work group seem to have a great load in the perception of freedom of expression. Even so, a fear related to expression remains, proof that there is an association between expression, fear and retaliation. If part of these fears can be interpreted in the psychological level, there is no way to deny that the fear of retaliation point towards a system in which the valorization of expression lives in parallel with the formal or informal adoption of punishment that can focus on expression itself, limiting communication.

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