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THE VALUE OF QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS
IN STUDYING HUMAN WORK EXPERIENCES:
A REFLECTION

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We propose a reflection about the value of qualitative interviewing as the (only) appropriate approach to studying individuals' work experiences. After illustrating some "core characteristics" of qualitative interviews, we discuss the defining attributes of work experience, identified in the unavoidable reference to individuals' subjectivity and meaning attribution about their work activity. Arguments that support the adequacy of interviewing when investigating this subject, as defined above, are then illustrated. A comparison with other approaches for studying work experience (e.g., "experience sampling methods") is also presented.

Keywords: Qualitative interview; Work experience; Work and organizational psychology; Experience sampling methods; Activity.

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Qualitative interviewing is pervasive in work and organizational psychology (WOP) and setting and conducting interviews is a core competence of work psychologists. Interviews are used in personnel selection, job analysis, training, organizational analysis, change management, to mention some areas of intervention of work psychologists. In many cases, qualitative interviewing and, in general, qualitative methods, are complemented by other, mainly quantitative methodologies. A typical example of the complementarity of qualitative and quantitative approaches is when qualitative methods are used to identify the relevant variables to be operationalized which are then extensively assessed by quantitative techniques. Actually, this example describes (even if in a very simplistic manner) the *mainstream* research approach in WOP, in which qualitative methods tend to be considered crucial during the preliminary phase of a research project, often labelled as ''exploratory." Qualitative methods contribute to the definition of a model of the phenomena at issue, which should be extensively verified, by means of quantitative methods, in order to confirm its validity and to demonstrate its generalizability so that it can be used to guide effective interventions or to make decisions in order to deal with organizational problems. In turn, the "validated" model can be employed as a reference point for developing qualitative interviews, as in selection interviews which consider candidate's KSAO, that is, knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics; or when using interviews to explore job demands and resources in a specific work environment, while developing stress prevention interventions, according to the job demand-resources model of work-related stress (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Demerouti et al., 2001).

However, there are research topics for which qualitative approaches — and in particular qualitative interviewing — can be considered the only adequate method to adopt for a full understanding of the object of study. In this case, it must be recognized that, given the characteristics of what is under scrutiny,

qualitative approaches are the only appropriate ones, while quantitative methods do not add any relevant contribution to the knowledge about the phenomenon. We do not make this claim to defend qualitative methods from the supposed primacy of quantitative approaches, considered as the only scientifically based research strategies; nor to repropose the qualitative-quantitative conflict. We are simply considering the fact that there are ''research areas'' which are ill suited for quantitative investigations. Obviously, this does not mean that these areas cannot be scientifically studied. On the contrary, acknowledging the relevance of qualitative methods in studying specific ''psychological objects'' is fully consistent with the assumption that scientific knowledge is defined by the adequacy of its forms and methods, considering the peculiarity of what is under investigation.

An issue strictly pertaining to qualitative research approaches concerns the understanding of human experience. In our contribution to this special issue, we will elaborate on this assertion, proposing arguments to sustain the (unique) value of qualitative interviews for understanding individuals' *work* experiences.

The article starts with a very general description of qualitative interviews, trying to identify their essential characteristics, those that distinguish interviews from other forms of interactions among participants involved in research situations.

The article then addresses the definition of work experience, which is crucial for the argument. Indeed, the pertinence and adequacy of any research method depends on the way the object of study is conceptualized. Therefore, we will reflect on the notions of work and experience, again trying to identify some essential aspects that characterize working activities as experienced by individuals.

Given this definition, the reasons why interviews can be considered the best method to investigate and understand human work experiences will be made explicit. Furthermore, a rapid comparison with other methods will be made to aid in grasping the specificity and adequacy of qualitative approaches for understanding working experiences. We will refer to methods like "experience sampling methods" (ESM) which were recently proposed to organizational researchers for the assessment of participants' experiences in work situations. The article ends by reflecting on the aim of psychological research and interventions when they are applied to work experience issues.

A GENERAL CHARACTERIZATION OF QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS

Qualitative interviews are fundamental instruments for work psychologists in order to realize research and interventions. Superficially, they can be considered rather effortless, given the fact that posing questions and receiving answers is a practice that characterizes the majority of our everyday social interactions. Actually, we know that qualitative interviewing is a sophisticated methodology which requires specific training, in particular when it is used as a "research tool" (Potter & Hepburn, 2005). In addition to the skills that must be acquired to conduct an interview properly, its difficulty and complexity is evidenced by the great variety of interview types, as well as the diversity of situations in which they are used and aims they can pursue (Montali et al., 2019). Thus, for example, we can differentiate interviews according to the degree to which they are structured, or according to the number of participants involved, as in individual, collective interviews, or even focus groups. Again, interviews can differ on the basis of their objectives, either for coping with some specific organizational requests, as in personnel selection or job analysis; or for broader research aims, as interviews that are used to explore organizational drawbacks from workers' perspectives in a change-making intervention. Differences also concern the approaches to analyzing interview protocols, as for example, in thematic analysis, interpretative-phenomenological analysis, discourse analy-

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sis, and so forth. In addition to reflecting the different research questions addressed, differences in the analyses also reflect different epistemological orientations about the type of knowledge that interviews are believed to generate. As regards this aspect, a variety of positions can be found in the relevant literature (Alvesson, 2003; Roulston, 2010). For some, according to a realist or (neo)positivist perspective, interviews give access to pre-existant inner states that the interviewer can grasp through careful questioning and which thus can be considered as a particular type of "objective data." In other cases, "interview data" are considered contingent on the interview situation and co-constructed as the result of the participants' dialogical interactions (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997). Again, other positions emphasize the necessarily interpretative nature of the information obtained through interviews. According to this view, what is retained as relevant information resulting from interviews is always a "part" of the whole "material" that is produced, and it depends on both the perspective adopted by the interviewer (aims and interests), and the contexts of interpretation and the communities of validation involved in the interpretative process (Kvale, 1996). According to yet another position, interviews have to be considered as empirical social situations to be studied as such; they should not be treated as tools for data collection on something that exists outside of this empirical situation. This "localist" position focuses its attention on what happens within the interview interaction, as represented by conversation and discourse analysis research programs (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Silverman, 2001). What happens during interviews can concern the transformation of beliefs and assumptions about the topics discussed. From this point of view, interviews are considered as "emancipatory tools" (Wolgemuth & Donohue, 2006), yet another way to consider these social situations.

Despite this complexity and variability of forms, types, aims, procedures, analyses, epistemological positions, we believe it is possible to identify a "common core" of all interviews; that is, some shared features that characterize all instances of this research *practice*.

In the following, we suggest four very essential defining characteristics of interviewing. It is not an exhaustive list and the characteristics concern aspects that can even seem trivial. However, in our opinion, these aspects are crucial to understanding why we consider interviews the appropriate way for understanding interviewees' experiences.

Firstly, any interview is based on an encounter of (at least) two different individuals. While the participants can be more than two, as in group interviews or focus groups, the simultaneous presence of at minimum of two participants is a defining constraint. This means that, by definition, an interview is a social practice, and it establishes a social situation. Moreover, as an encounter with another specific person, unfolding in time, an interview is always contingent on the situation while it happens, and it is as unique and unrepeatable as any lived situation. No two interviews are identical, even when they involve the same individuals, discuss the same themes, formulate the same questions; at most, they are similar. As such, the conduct and outcome of an interview is neither predictable nor fully controllable; on the contrary, it is always open to what happens during the interaction among the participants.

What happens is that one individual poses certain questions about certain issues and the other(s) replies accordingly with his/her (their) answers. This activity is a second defining characteristic of all interviews: each interview gives rise to a dialogue among the participants. It is a "linguistic exchange" between individuals, intentionally initiated (not informal, as conversations are) with specific aims, and whose course of action is (loosely) guided by the questions (initially) defined by the interviewer. Participating in an interview does not mean "providing answers" as if it were a transaction in response to a request; it does not entail merely choosing between different response alternatives or agreeing or disagreeing to what is stated by the interviewer. Rather, as a dialogue, the interviewer's questions represent an opportunity for interviewees to express their point of view about the issues addressed, to state their opinion, to communi-

cate their knowledge. The interviewees can also suggest new lines of inquiry that can redefine the interview guidelines. At the same time, thanks to the solicitation of the interviewers, interviewing can be an occasion, for the interviewees, to reflect upon their beliefs, to view the situations in which they are involved or are talking about differently. That is, interviewing can be an exercise of reflexivity, and this may also apply to the interviewers. In this reciprocal process, individuals participating in an interview can learn from each other and indeed interviewing can be considered a learning situation.

This leads to the third fundamental characteristic of interviews, which refers to the fact that, in all interviews, participants — the interviewers and the interviewees — contribute jointly and actively to the result, albeit through different roles. Clearly, during interviews, power is asymmetrical, in favor of the interviewers: they define the situation, introduce the topics, and steers the course of the dialogue. This aspect is constitutive of any interview relation. Indeed, the very act of posing questions, the way they are proposed, their construction and wording, can orient — either consciously or unconsciously — the interviewee's answers. This raises the issue of the interviewee's sincerity and the potentially manipulative role of the interviewer. It is an unavoidable "risk" which, clearly, also depends on the awareness of the participants about the potential presence and relevance of the risk itself. However, from the side of the interviewer, this risk can be approached and, at least partially, solved pragmatically in order to try to minimize the effects of the asymmetry. Interviewers should be able to adapt flexibly to the evolving situation, for example, following up relevant new leads evoked by the interviewees. They should listen actively to what interviewees say, allowing the interviewees' discourse to unfold freely, thus ensuring that it will be substantial in quality and quantity. In fact, the ability to involve and interest interlocutors on the topics and the aims of the interview, as well as to promote their active participation, is a skill required to conduct an interview properly. On the other hand, it must be recognized that respondents in qualitative interviews are not merely data provider, limiting their answers to the piece of information required by the interviewers. We have already seen that they elaborate on interviewers' questions, expressing their thoughts, perceptions, and emotions. The interview setting is (and should be) such as to allow participants to freely express their subjectivity along with the meaning they give to the issues discussed or the situations they are involved in. When we say "express their subjectivity" we also mean that in a qualitative interview participants act not only as role representatives (e.g., "the interviewee," "the interviewer" but even "the worker," "the client," "the employee," "the researcher," etc.) but also as "whole individuals" with their unique and complex identity considered in its integrity. When involved in an interview, individuals always speak from multiple perspectives simultaneously: as category members, as role interpreters with reference to the interview setting, as unique individuals with their unique history, preferences, attitudes, and so forth. It is also for this reason, that what is expressed or discussed in an interview cannot be restricted in advance to the topic at issue. This holds for every interview, but it is particularly relevant when the issue considered concerns an individual's experience. Given these characteristics, it is clear that no standard procedures or rules can be set to assure a successful interview. Again, openness and flexibility emerge as typical characteristics of qualitative interviews.

The last, and probably most obvious defining characteristic of interviews concerns its "output" or "raw data," which are always linguistic in nature. No measures are obtained from interviewing; neither data, properly speaking, if the term "data" defines something that can be objectively evaluated, that can be associated to numbers which unambiguously describe (some of) the object's properties; numbers that can mathematically analysed. In most cases, the language material resulting from interviews comes in the form of written texts that approximate the form of a narrative text (Kvale, 1996), whose contents can be descriptions, reasoning, memories, opinions, and so forth. Certainly, interview transcripts miss a lot of information about the interviewing situation; that is, about what happens among participants *during* interviews. Indeed,

transcripts are decontextualized and detemporalized texts that transform a living, ongoing oral conversation or discourse in a fixated, stable written text. Some scholars argue that transcripts should analytically record, through conventional symbols, the features that characterize a conversation (pause, intonation, emphasis, overlapping, etc.), since these aspects are also important for interpreting interview content (Potter & Hepburn, 2005). Others claim that a detailed transcription, capturing all the features of the participants' interactions is less necessary when the aim of the analyses concerns the meanings expressed by the interviewees about aspects of their subjectivity and their lives beyond the current interaction (Smith et al., 2005). However, when defining the "core characteristics" of interviews, what matters is that the interviews' "raw data" are always narratively organized. These narratives are stories, or part of stories, expressed by interviewees and not merely a collection of elements or pieces of informations (that is, countable variables) referring to interviewees' opinions, beliefs, or representations about the topics or about their experiences. It is through these narratives and through the act of telling stories that interviewees make sense of what is happening and communicate their meanings about their experiences and the way they experience them. These subjectively meaningful narratives, independently from the accuracy of their transcription in the form of texts, can be considered the objective facts open to psychological investigation according to a double perspective. On the one hand, when viewed as expression of personal meanings and description of individuals lived experiences, they reveal the participants' unique subjectivity and, as such, they are unique and personal. On the other hand, since these texts are produced by individuals belonging to the same social situation and speaking the same language, the narratives resulting from interviews can enlighten the cultural constraints that shape individuals' thoughts and actions.

To summarize, the "core definition" of interviews can be stated as follows: they are a social practice which establishes a dialogue between (at least) two interlocutors, who collaboratively participate in producing a narrative about the topic at issue (e.g., individuals' work experience in a given context).

We can add a final consideration regarding the realizations of interviews, in particulare when their aim concerns the understanding of human experience. As a practice, interviewing is an activity with a beginning and an end. It is worth noting that when used in WOP settings, interviews can be considered an episode within organizational activities. We use the term "episode" following Beal et al. (2005) who define it as a behavioural segment that is thematically organized around organizationally relevant goals or desired end states (see also Barker, 1963, 1968). So, for example, we can set an interview in order to explore work-related stress determinants from the workers' perspectives, or to conduct a job or a task analysis obtaining information from expert informants. In both examples, interviews can be considered composed of a series of activities that have a coherent, thematic organization and are associated with specific individuals, occurrences, and goals; globally considered, these activities constitute, in fact, an episode, that has a recognizable thematic coherence. However, as such, interviewing has a peculiar status because it is both part of the organizational life and, at the same time, it is external (or peripheral) to the core organizational operations. Indeed, participation in an interview entails interrupting the activities that are usually carried out while working. This aspect is not irrelevant as regards the use of interviews in WOP settings, as we will discuss at the end of this contribution.

DEFINING WORK EXPERIENCE

In a relatively recent article by Weiss and Rupp (2011), the authors posed the question of "what would an examination be like […] of a full and focused appreciation of the individual at work" (p. 86). The

authors also criticized the current prevailing paradigm in WOP which they considered to be based on an abstract representation of the "working man," as well as "too limiting for a full work psychology" (p. 87). Instead, the authors argued for a different paradigm for research in WOP, which can lead to effectively understand the real ways in which humans relate to work. As part of their arguments, the authors tried to characterize the proper object of the "new" paradigm they argued for. Moreover, they presented a possible research agenda that can be derived from their suggested approach. They also warned that their essay is to be considered an initial and partial reflection on the issue.

In any case, what is the answer to the question posed by Weiss and Rupp in their article? That is, what is the adequate topic of study for the 'full' WOP that they advocated? To put the question in another way: what does it mean to understand individuals' work from a psychological point of view, rather than from a standpoint of other disciplines like economy or sociology? The answer is what the authors call a work psychology with a focus on work experience from the worker's point of view, that is, a perspective that focuses its attention on "the person in all of his or her subjectivity" (p. 84); they summarize this topic of study and this approach with the expression "person-centric work psychology."

We can attempt to make some implications, deriving from this definition, more explicit. Firstly, it means that studying work from a psychological point of view requires adopting a first-person perspective. That is, psychologists should study work "through the eyes" of those who are working. In other words, the focus of WOP must be the workers' subjectivity and the aim of a person-centric psychology is to clarify how it manifests itself in work activities. This necessarily leads to considering workers' personal experiences, what Weiss and Rupp (2011) called "lived-through experience of working." In fact, any experience is, by definition, subjective. As the authors wrote: "… a person-centric work psychology will want to take account of the nature of the experience itself, the 'what it is like' to work or to experience certain events, the subjective feeling, the flow of time, the focus of attention, the search of meaning" (p. 87).

Reference to meaning is crucial for the argument since it is in the attribution of meaning to one's own actions and activities that the psychological dimension of the experience can be found. Actually, studying "psychologically" the worker's experience means understanding the meanings that he/she associates with it, where the term "meaning" is here to be understood in a broad sense, to indicate the representations, purposes, motives, affections that guide and make sense of the activities of the subjects "in the first person."

The emphasis on subjects' experience and meaning attribution also implies recognizing the uniqueness of any work experience, which needs to be considered a segment of an individual life, experienced by a particular individual in a particular situation. At the same time, the way in which this segment is experienced is also guided by rules and practices rooted in the social and historical situation where the work takes place. So the worker's experience is singular and idiosyncratic as well as socially and historically determined. It is singular because it is the experience of an individual and the expression of a unique subjectivity; and it is social and historical, because the way this personal working life is objectively structured, as well as subjectively experienced and expressed, depends on the forms assumed by the work in a given historical period and on the linguistic bonds of the community to which the individuals belong.

This consideration about work experience — which should be considered both singular and collective — brings to mind a research program in WOP that can be considered similar to the person-centric perspective. We are referring to the practice approaches to the study of organizational activities (Miettinen et al., 2009; Sandberg & Dall'Alba, 2009; Simpson, 2009) which focus their attention on the study of organizational lives "in terms of phenomena that are actually done, as they become evident in the 'here-and-now'" (Miettinen et al., 2009, p. 1309), and aim at understanding "practice as taking place simultaneously both locally and globally, being both unique and culturally shared, 'here and now' as well as historically

constituted" (p. 1310). As an empirical program, the practice approach is interested in studying what individuals do in their everyday life. In work situations, the practice perspective focuses on "what people do every day to get their work done" (p. 1312), an expression that evokes "work experience" as the topic of study.

According to the practice approaches, notions like "actor," "act," "activity" represent the fundamental conceptual tools for understanding individuals lived experiences from their first-person point of view, as they occur in real settings.

In fact, the notion of worker's activity can be considered the "core concept" which characterizes the worker experience to be conceptualized as subjects' reflexive perception of what is going on and what they are doing. However, we must clarify the meaning of "activity" in this context.

In this case, "activity" does not denote the well-ordered sequence of actions or the well-defined set of behaviors to be accomplished in order to get some results, as can be found in a task analysis or job description. Actually, this prescribed meaning of "activity" can be considered a description from a third-person perspective. This is an abstraction, something that does not exist in a real work setting. Indeed, the word "activity" should be considered as referring to the workers' "interpretation" of the abstract descriptions that they make, while performing their job in the real work setting. It concerns the "acting" of individuals unfolding over time, according to the constraints in the working situation. In fact, we are always dealing with active subjects, who do not ever merely perform procedures, nor do they limit themselves to simply and slavishly follow instructions. To grasp this meaning of the notion of "activity" it can be useful to consider the distinction between *prescribed* versus *real* work that we can trace to the French tradition of WOP (Leplat & Hoc, 1983), or even to the difference between *prescribed* versus *realized* activities (Clot, 2006). According to these distinctions, what is prescribed is the abstract characterization of work activity, something that never exists. The real activity is the way workers concretely perform to carry out their tasks or to reach their objectives in a specific setting. This never happens according to prescriptions, since individuals in real situations have to cope with unforeseen impediments, hitches, obstacles. Moreover, they must take into account all the others (colleagues, supervisors, clients) with whom one is always in relation in work contexts, either as a beneficiary of one's actions or as a source of requests, and whose reactions are also unpredictable. Therefore, workers continuously adapt their behaviors to the requests of the situation, make choices to cope with variability, even violate the prescriptions in order to get their work done. They do so actively and creatively, being engaged "as a whole person," expressing one's self, which is the result of own personal history, pursuing one's objectives, according to the meaning they attribute to the entire situation in which they are involved and to the actions they are taking. These actions cannot be considered the activation of stable and separate functions or processes or resources or skills, identical for everyone and available to everyone to a lesser or greater degree, which can be combined and used according to a sort of standardized schema that can be adapted to different potential situations. In a sense, the way in which individuals "play" their job is always "new," being determined by their knowledge, representations, beliefs, emotions, evoked by the situation and by the "intentionality" and meanings that characterize their conduct. All these aspects distinguish the "real" activity which, as a consequence, is always contingent to where and when it happens, and which is open to unpredictable developments. At the same time, as already stated, any activity is not entirely idiosyncratic; some regularities are in any case identifiable since it is guided by the usual ways of doing things that have settled over time, influenced by norms, cultures, professional expertise, and so forth. However, habits can change thanks to the contribution of real workers' activities, according to a continuous dialectical development through which activities are both reproduced and transformed.

Thus, the "real" activity, as it has been briefly sketched above, is an activity evolving over time, according to the constraints of the situation, carried out by individuals who must be considered in their entirety, capable, and always committed to giving meaning to their actions. It is these "individuals' significant activities" that should be considered the object and the unit of analysis of a person-centered work psychology.

QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWING AND WORK EXPERIENCE

The reasons why qualitative interviewing should be considered the (only) adequate method for understanding work experience become obvious, when one agrees with the above-mentioned arguments.

Actually, it is only through individuals' narratives that we can access their experiences. What individuals say, the stories they tell during interviews, communicates their intentions, the meanings they attribute to the situations they are experiencing or have experienced, and to the actions they are performing or have performed in the past. These narratives, these texts resulting from a dialogue with an interviewer express the interviewees' points of view about their own experiences. As such, they represent the individuals' "truth" about their lived-through experiences and must be considered unquestionable facts, since the only criterion to establish their "validity" is the subjectivity of the storyteller. It is worth noting that these facts which represent the objects of study when the focus concerns individual experiences logically precede the approaches of analysis that can be adopted. That is, they constitute the "raw material" to which different approaches to analyzing can be applied, be they realist, phenomenological, or constructionist (Willig, 2019).

What has been said so far concerns the adequacy of the contents we can obtain with an interview with respect to the object of research, namely, the worker's experience. However, the adequacy and coherence with the research aim of understanding experience also concern qualitative interviewing procedures.

Firstly, as we have already seen, the interview situation recognizes the active role of the participants and, in particular, of the interviewees, who are the only persons who can speak about their own experience. As much as possible, they are free to say whatever they consider to be crucial and relevant, as regards the situation they are discussing. A major skill for an expert interviewer is guaranteeing this freedom, so as to facilitate the interviewee's communications.

Moreover, qualitative interviewing recognizes the uniqueness and singularity of any experience and the necessary and unavoidable retrospective character of any discourse. From this perspective, an interview is an opportunity to reflect on experience, rather than a mere description. This can make respondents more aware about the determinants and characteristics of the situation in which they are involved (from their point of view). In so doing, it may happen that they realize that things could have gone differently and that, for example, there are different ways of carrying out their job. Therefore, interviewing allows you to recognize a fundamental aspect of any experience: the fact that it cannot be predicted or controlled. One can try to orient it, to partially determine its occurrence, but what really happens is always open to the unexpected and, consequently, cannot be reduced to unequivocal interpretations. Thus, interviewing can be a starting point for the growth and improvement of an individual's (work) experience.

To better understand the value of qualitative interviews for studying workers' experience, it can be helpful to briefly compare the qualitative approach with a methodology that has recently undergone intense developments, thanks to contemporary improvements in the area of information technology. The comparison is not aimed at diminishing the interest toward this new approach. Rather, it can clarify our argument in fa-

vour of the value of qualitative interviewing, by showing a very different approach to the understanding of workers' experiences. We are considering the collection of methods known under the umbrella label of "experience sampling methods" (ESM). Apart from technical details that differentiate the various methods, their shared goal is clearly relevant for the topic we are here discussing: "capturing a representative range of experiences as they occur in their natural environment" (Beal, 2015, p. 384). When used in WOP research projects, the topic at study become a worker's experience as it occurs in real settings.

In a typical experience sampling design, participants are repeatedly assessed at various intervals (ranging from a few hours to once a day) for a study duration of one or two weeks. The information collected (normally through the repeated administration of a brief structured questionnaire) concerns the characteristics of the respondents, those of the situation in which they are involved, and the perceptions that the participants have of them. The variables assessed are those considered relevant by the researchers according to the specific aims of their study. In particular, researchers' interests refer to episodes and event reactions that play out within each person's stream of experience.

Therfore, ESM studies are a type of quantitative research, but with some characteristics that should overcome the drawbacks usually associated with traditional surveys. Firstly, as we have already seen, researchers adopting ESM approaches are interested in assessing experiences as they occur in daily life, that is, they strongly strive for ecological validity and focus their attention on what happens in specific work-situations. Secondly, they pay particular attention to within-person variability concerning behaviors and psychological states, thus demonstrating their interest in individual singularity, as well as recognizing the uniqueness of individual experiences. Moreover, ESM studies try to capture a wide range of aspects of every individual's work life, thus paying attention to the complexity of one's experience and not only to some specific and partial characteristics. These aspects make the ESM research methods interesting for studying (work) experience.

However, in our opinion, there is a fundamental flaw in this approach that raises doubts as to whether this method is appropriate to the subject matter of the study, at least as we have conceptualized it in the previous section. We refer to the absence of what we have called a "first-person perspective" which, in our opinion, represents an essential characteristic of defining experience. In fact, according to ESM approaches, what experience is considered to be is, in some way, pre-defined by the researcher through the variables assessed in the studies. Little or no room is left for participants to express the meanings they attribute to their personal experiences and to indicate "how" they see the situation in which they are involved. As a consequence, participants are treated as "subjects," and their active role is restricted to being "data providers," as when they are requested to assess the frequency of a given behavior or the level of the psychological state they are experiencing. Moreover, experience is constrained by the limited representation implicit in the variables used, thus missing another essential characteristic, that is, its openness to the unforeseen, its unpredictability. In a way, the experience is assumed to be a "given," a stable (at least temporary) scenario where subjects' activities take place. Experience is seen more as something that happens to subjects than something continuously produced by participants. No room is left for the telling of *their* stories about the situation *they* are experiencing. What is collected are recordings of participants' evaluations or reactions to events and facts, that are conceived as representing the experienced situation "from the outside," so to speak, according to the researcher representation.

Clearly, behind these different conceptualizations of "experience" and the resulting differences in research strategies, there are different (maybe, incommensurable) epistemological and philosophical positions about the objects and the aims of psychological investigation, whose discussion is beyond the scope of this brief article.

However, to conclude our reflection, we can limit ourselves to some pragmatic aspects of the respective research approaches. As we have already discussed, interviewing about an experience can be an opportunity to "think differently" about one's habits, to clarify one's projects, to increase one's awareness about, for example, one's work situation. Interviewer and interviewee cooperate on these goals and interviewing can be an occasion to promote the participants' development and growth, as well as to orient organizational change, in accordance with workers' specific and ever-evolving needs or objectives.

In contrast, ESM approaches seem to be motivated by the need for control. Research results are used to develop models that can help predict individuals' behavior or psychological states, given certain circumstances or certain situations. It is then possible to design and realize activities or situations, aimed at obtaining the desired results, in terms, for example, of individuals' performance or satisfaction. In this case, it is a matter of adaptation rather than of development, either of individuals to situations or of situations to individuals, in order to obtain the best results for all involved.

In any case, to opt for one of the two positions, development or adaptation, concerning the aims of WOP interventions, depends on how one interprets the role and functions of psychologists, and this precedes any methodological choice.

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