



TEORIA DAS ORGANIZAÇÕES

CLIENTELISTIC ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES IN NORTHEAST BRAZIL

PRÁTICAS ORGANIZACIONAIS CLIENTELISTAS NO NORDESTE BRASILEIRO

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents an analysis of the management practices in a multinational company located in Northeastern Brazil, considered in the light of one of the predominant features of social relations the regional culture, clientelism/coronelismo. The research consisted of two stages, a survey and a case study. In the first stage, as a total of 3,000 workers were involved, we chose to perform sampling in which a simple random probability sample was obtained with a confidence level of 90%. In the second stage, we carried out semi-structured interviews and direct observation, allowing a broader view of the field under study. Based on the results obtained, we tried to make analogies between aspects of the regional culture and organizational practices observed in the company. Organizational practices typical of the 'old' Brazilian clientelism/coronelismo were found to persist, though wearing new clothes. The manager of a modern organization is representative of the old "Coronel", reformed by developmental and technological processes.

KEYWORDS

Clientelism. Clientelistic Organizational Practices. Quality Work of Life. Northeast Brazil.

RESUMO

O objetivo deste artigo é apresentar uma análise das práticas de gestão de uma empresa multinacional situada no nordeste brasileiro, realizada à luz de um aspecto da cultura nordestina, o clientelismo/coronelismo. Foi realizado um estudo de caso em duas etapas. Na primeira, optou-se por realizar amostragem devido à quantidade de trabalhadores, três mil no total. Foi utilizada a amostra probabilística aleatória simples com nível de confiança de 90%. Na segunda etapa, foram realizadas entrevistas semiestruturadas e observação direta, possibilitando uma visão mais abrangente do campo pesquisado. Com base nos resultados obtidos, buscou-se apresentar analogias entre aspectos da cultura existente na região e práticas organizacionais observadas na empresa. O que se constatou foi o uso de práticas organizacionais típicas do “velho” clientelismo/coronelismo brasileiro, apenas com novas roupagens. O gestor de uma organização moderna pode ser o antigo coronel reformado pelos processos desenvolvimentistas e tecnológicos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE:

Clientelismo. Práticas Organizacionais Clientelistas. Qualidade de Vida no Trabalho. Nordeste Brasileiro.

INTRODUCTION

Without knowledge of the context, the act of administration, like that of producing a genuine theory, is impracticable. Thus, it is necessary to show the context in which the varied concepts, procedures and administrative techniques are applied, which also means showing what practical features of this *locus* may influence the development of new knowledge about their own Administration, at least in the Latin American context. Accordingly, investigations into organizational practices that take into account the aspect of clientelism, which is firmly present in Latin American culture and, therefore, in Northeastern Brazil may provide knowledge for future studies in the Administrative Sciences that are based on the real conditions in Brazil.

We stress that the aim of this paper is

to present an analysis of organizational management practices in a multinational company located in Northeastern Brazil, carried out in the light of a particular aspect of northeastern culture, clientelism/*coronelismo*. The analyses were made based on the results of a survey on the quality of work life (QWL) of employees in the production sector of the company and the organizational practices of managers who directly influence the perception that the employees in the production sector have regarding their QWL. Based on the results obtained regarding the organizational practices used by managers, we sought to make analogies between cultural aspects of the region and organizational practices observed in the company. We also attempt to show the existence of organizational practices found in certain contexts within Brazil that need to

be included as part of the theoretical construction undertaken in Brazil.

So, to begin with, the issue of clientelism in Northeastern Brazil is discussed as a background to organizational practices used in that region. The term ‘clientelism’ in the Northeast region, that is, in the landed estates and in many factories located in the region, is also known as ‘*coronelismo*’, a symbol of authoritarianism which originated during the early colonial period in Brazil. The practice, which gained momentum during the reign of Dom Pedro Ist and lasted to the end of the twentieth century, dominated the Brazilian political scene, especially in the Northeast. Clientelism is seen as a system in which there is an exchange of favors, the exchange of goods and services for some kind of support, including political support, a kind of manipulation and control strategy that uses the differentiated management of inequality and a set of subjectification devices, that is, it is a system that feeds on and creates asymmetries and the dependence of those in need of goods and services in relation to those who want to obtain some kind of support or benefit (MAZZEO, 2007).

The research, conducted in two stages, allowed the observation of the influence of clientelistic attitudes in the organizational practices within the studied company. The first procedure then, was to examine the main journals and academic meetings in the area of administration that deal with the issue of quality of work life to verify whether researchers in the Administrative Sciences have taken this aspect of Brazilian culture into account. It was noted that many researchers did not consider the context or region of Brazil where the studied organization was located to be relevant. Hence,

in many cases, the contextualization of certain features present in the region that can influence the organizational practices in firms is insufficient to facilitate a full understanding of the studied phenomenon.

In this article, then, we have attempted to analyze the organizational practices in the studied company considering the clientelistic practices existing in Brazil, to contribute to the production of knowledge in the area, and specifically in Latin America, from the understanding of local organizational practices.

This paper is organized as follows: first we present the methodological procedures; then the theoretical references used in the analysis of the results in order to present the organizational practices that are part of the local culture and decisively influence practices in some organizations. The third section introduces the context within which the organization is located, and shows the results of the research analyzed from the perspective of the clientelistic – *coronelistic* practices typical of the region and, finally, we make some concluding remarks.

It is noted, *a priori*, that in this study it was decided to present analogies of the existing practices in the region with the organizational practices observed in the company as they appeared, so as not to de-contextualize them, while also avoiding the dichotomy between theory and practice, in an effort to reduced repetitiveness.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

The research presented was conducted in two stages and is the result of a case study conducted in a factory located in Northeast Brazil. According to Yin (2005),

case study is an empirical investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within its context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly defined, as in the practices of the organization concerned and the organizational practices typical of the region.

In the first stage of research, due to the large number of workers involved, 3,000, it was decided to use a simple random probability sample. The main feature of probability sampling is that it can be subjected to statistical analysis, allowing sampling errors and other aspects relevant to the significance and representativeness of the sample to be offset. In the random sample, according to Ackoff (1967, p. 124-7), each element of the population has the same chance of being chosen. The basis for calculating the sample is that of Cochran (1977, p. 78), where N - population, n - sample and E - error.

$$n = \frac{N \times \frac{1}{E^2}}{N + \frac{1}{E^2}}$$

The adequate sample size for a confidence level of 90%, i.e. an error of only 10% indicated the need to work with 97 employees, as there were 3,000 in the universe of workers in the study as reference. The questionnaire used consisted of open and closed questions. With the former, the purpose was to identify new values or characteristics within the worked sample in terms of the individual/work/organizational relationships.

In the latter, greater objectivity was sought with the use of the closed questions. The instrument, consisting primarily of questions with a Likert scale, was composed of three parts, divided into sec-

tions. The first part consisted of questions intended to reveal personal and professional information on the respondent and the second comprised questions designed to measure the variables or criteria that indicate the level of quality of work life. The criteria used were those established by Walton (1973) and address the conceptual categories of QWL. There are eight criteria, each of which is composed of QWL indicators: 1. *fair and adequate compensation*: internal and external equivalence, fair compensation, the sharing of productivity gains, proportionality between wages; 2. *working conditions*, reasonable working hours, safe and healthy physical environment, absence of insanitary conditions; 3. *the use and development of skills*: autonomy, relative self-supervision, multiple qualities, information about the overall work process; 4. *opportunity for growth and security*: career opportunities, personal growth, prospects of wage enhancement and job security; 5. *integration in the organization*: the absence of prejudice and the presence of equality, mobility, relationships, sense of community; 6. *constitutionalism*: worker rights and protection, personal privacy, freedom of expression, fairness, labor rights; 7. *work and total life space*: balanced work role, schedule stability, few changes of location, family leisure time; 8. *social relevance of work in life*: corporate image, corporate social responsibility, product responsibility, employment practices. A simple statistical treatment with SPSS was used with the collected data.

Finally, to measure the rates of productivity, turnover and absenteeism, documental evidence was collected by searching the records of the organization. Direct observation was also used, which is a feature in field research that can guide the researcher

to look for something specific, highlighting the features that matter to the investigation and at the same time, and permitting direct experience with the research subjects, allowing a more comprehensive view of the whole (TRIVIÑOS, 1987). In the case of this research, direct observation and the results obtained provided the insight into the degree to which the organization's practices are representative of regional clientelism.

Clientelism

Clientelism refers to the structuring of political power through networks of informal relationships that link individuals with unequal power in exchange relations. In clientelistic structures of authority, the power lies in the superior individual (boss, sovereign, or head of the clan), who personally decides how to distribute resources according to personal preferences. This perspective [may] be represented by the State at the top of the pyramid headed by an executive who directly or indirectly dispenses favors to those who are below through a network of complex patron-client type relationships, which connects the top social structure with the base (BRACHET-MÁRQUEZ, 1992, p. 93).

Such relations are based on social vulnerability, the suppression of social ties, want, misinformation and precariousness, and is installed in such a way that it reproduces those conditions in order to perpetuate the positions consolidated at all levels (MAZZEO, 2007, p. 173). The different levels of leaders and managers, that is, the 'bosses' and their 'intermediaries, use avail-

able resources to secure various manifestations of 'loyalty'. Certainly, use of the term 'exchange' represents an attempt to hide the asymmetric conditions and vertical and hierarchical control upon which the relationship is based. The 'clients', in fact, have little option (MAZZEO, 2007, p. 169).

Relations of this kind, established, mainly in the interior of Northeastern Brazil, in a sense, have conditioned or habituated the workers in that region to working relationships that are imposed both by force and by the figure of the '*coronel*' as leader, in the sense of a 'savior of the homeland'. The expression of clientelism in the Northeast, that is, on large estates and in many factories located in the region is known as "*coronelismo*", symbolizes authoritarianism and comes from the colonial period in Brazil. Brachet-Márquez (1992) also notes that this form of political organization, initially perceived as a typical feature of pre-modern oligarchic societies, is also recognized as a more or less permanent feature of political systems in Latin America. The practice, which gained momentum during the reign of Dom Pedro Ist and lasted to the end of the twentieth century, dominated the Brazilian political scene, especially in the Northeast.

Historically, the title of coronel was given to owners of large farms that participated in the National Guard. Created in 1831, the Brazilian National Guard was inspired by the French bourgeois National Guard, a civilian militia consisting of an armed group representing the property owners that patrolled the streets substituting traditional forces. Like the French original, in order to become a member of the Brazilian National Guard it was

necessary to have the resources to acquire both the arms and uniform. During the Regency period (1831-1842) military titles were sold and owners and landlords, as well as their descendants were able to acquire titles of lieutenant, captain, major, lieutenant coronel and coronel in the National Guard. Thus, the coronel came to represent authority amongst the humbler sections of the population who became dependent upon him. With the Republic, although the National Guard was disbanded, the coronels retained their power not only on their own land but also in adjacent and surrounding areas (GARCIA, 2005, p. 3).

As Silva (2007, p. 41) states, “although it is hallmark of the Old Republic, the clientelism remains a cultural pattern of behavior that persists into modern urban Brazil, that is, it is not unique to agrarianism and political backwardness of oligarchic rule.” What is noted is that clientelism persists as a specific form of social exchange. Clientelism, when contrasted with the procedural universalism that characterizes modern societies reveals its main feature: “specific exchange”. While with universalism, one observes impersonal “generalized exchange”, with clientelism one sees that the exchanges are specific and personal (NUNES, 2003, p.21). Each object or action that is exchanged contains a reference to the general condition of a person or group, so emphasizing that it is always a relationship of asymmetrical exchange.

Clientelism is a system characterized by paradoxical situations, because it involves: a peculiar com-

bination of inequality and imbalance of power with an apparent mutual solidarity, in terms of personal identity and feelings and interpersonal bonds, a combination of exploitation and potential coercion with voluntary relations and compelling mutual obligations, and a combination of emphasis on these obligations and solidarity with the slightly illegal or semi-illegal aspect of these relationships. The crucial point is, in fact, the organization or regulation of the exchange or flow of resources between social actors (NUNES, 2003, p.28).

Since the Old Republic then, clientelism has been the background to all levels of Brazilian literature, from the *literatura de cordel* (cordel literature, cheap popular comic-books) to the literature of the vanguard, including political literature (GARCIA, 2005) and has left its mark, even in the organizational practices of multinational organizations based in Latin America, most notably in Northeastern Brazil. According to Garcia (2005), for political science, clientelism represents the relationship between the government and farmers and landowners, regional oligarchic leaders, which were based on the mutual exploitation of their powers. “A peculiar form of private power, that is, an adaptation whereby the residue of our ancient and exorbitant private power has managed to coexist with a political regime based on extensive representation” (LEAL, 1997, p. 40). Thus, according to Garcia (2005, p. 3), “with strong political power, the coronel, the large landowner, was directly responsible for the political influence of the local population and the election of the candidate he supported. In exchange

for this support, the landowner received benefits from the government such as the persecution of his adversaries and other political favors.”

Throughout the period of the Old Republic (1889-1930), the *coronelismo* marked the political life of Brazil, with the main characteristic being the almost total concentration of power in the hands of large landowners. According to Faoro (2001), at the national level, this situation began to recede due to the centralizing character of the governments of Getulio Vargas who was responsible for a sharp decline *coronelista* system. According to the author, the first signs of discomfort with this system can be observed in the liberal movements supporting national urbanization and industrialization. Although, to date, in some corners of the country it is still possible to find landlords who exert great political influence over the local population that is economically and culturally dependent on them.

Thus, the figure of the coronel can be seen as, the boss in a clientelistic relationship, with a strong and dominant presence in the national symbolic imagery. However, in Northeastern Brazil beyond the symbolism, it has remained the predominant form of behavior and it seems it is being incorporated by organizations based in the region. The result is the survival of clientelism, which is adapted here and there, “abandoning the rings in order to keep the fingers” (LEAL, 1997, p. 284).

As Faoro (2001, p. 636) points out, the power of the coronel, “derives more from the traditionally recognized prestige and social honor than from the economic situation.” Barriera (1992, p. 18) also strongly emphasizes that the political domination of coronel in the *Sertão* “does not need nor is

imposed merely through force, but by acceptance and recognition, through ideological mechanisms that make reality imperceptible to those who are dominated.”

The range of prestige and influence of coronel is fading due to the presence of other forces, around which new leaderships are being structured. This does not mean that *coronelismo* has come to an end. What does it matter that the ‘Coronel’ has become the ‘Doctor’? Or that the farm has been transformed into a factory? Or that his foremen have become aides or technicians? The underlying reality has not altered in the areas in which it has been confined. The phenomenon of *coronelismo* persists even as a reflection of a situation of income distribution, in which the workers’ economic condition is barely distinguishable from poverty (LEAL, 1997, p. 18).

Clientelistic practices, therefore, persist, at least in Northeastern Brazil. “...even with all the political and socio-economic transformations that have occurred in the Brazilian scenario, from the 1930s to the present. [...] in essence *coronelismo* has continued unchanged” (SOUSA, 1995, p. 13). That is, though, at least theoretically, at an end, clientelistic/*coronelistic* practices have continued to be used in some regions of Brazil and been ignored by the literature on administration, as guiding practices in these regions.

Specifically considering the state in which the studied organization is located, Ceará, it appears that the organizational practices observed in the search results are appropriate to the context. This is be-

cause the poverty of the people of this region, especially the rural population who migrate to the cities in search of work in factories, such as that under study in this research, together with the civil and intellectual backwardness constitute a particularly conducive *corpus* to the exercise of clientelistic practices (LEAL, 1997).

In 2010, the population of Ceará State is approximately 8.6 million people and life expectancy, although rising, is still one of the lowest in the country, at 71 years, as opposed to more than 75 years in South and Southeast, according to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, 2009). In the Northeast, 77% of municipalities have more than half of their population living in poverty, far exceeding the national average (32.6%). Of the 25 counties with the highest incidence of poverty in Brazil, five are in Ceará State (IBGE, 2008). Of particular note is Saboeiro County, which occupies 9th place in the national ranking, where 79.5% of the population is poor. In Fortaleza, the state capital, 43.2% of a total population, 1.9 million inhabitants, are considered poor (IBGE, 2008).

According to Barroso (2005) and Sousa (2004), clientelism/coronelismo in Ceará has never been a peaceful system. The very nature of the kind of domination it exercises implies the adoption of coercion and threats. For the effective exercise of this domination, the coronels relied on an element known among the local population as the *rebenque* or “instrument of social peace”: a small leather whip used to punish those who tried to oppose the established order or adopt an assertive attitude.

The practice of *coronelismo* reached such a point in Ceará that “a relationship of personal domination ‘Coronel’ over his de-

pendents was established”. When someone asked, “Who are you?” The answer invariably received was “I’m one of Coronel So and So’s people’. These people constitute the clients of the ‘Coronel’ (QUEIROZ, 1985, p. 185). As we shall see, this discourse is similar to that observed among the employees in the studied company.

This manner of responding immediately permitted the listener to know the socio-economic rank and political position of the respondent. The term ‘people’ first indicated that it was not someone of the same level as the coronel or his family, otherwise the relationship would be invoked at the outset to situate the individual within the group (say, for example, am a cousin of Coronel So and So (QUEIROZ, 1985, p. 185).

As Franco (2002) points out, clientelism/*coronelismo* seeks to maintain the vertical organizational and autocratic methods of regulation, hindering both the democratization of society as well as that of any organization in that society that adopts coronelistic practices as guidelines for organizational practice.

As Crubellate (2002) succinctly puts it, it is “a new patch on old clothes.” Some of the nuances of the phenomenon have changed, but everything remains the same, albeit with the emergence of new structural models. The company is installed in the midst of this ‘cultural milieu’, and as can be seen, it uses local clientelistic practices, among others, to define its organizational practices.

QUALITY OF WORK LIFE

Matos (1993, p. 361) says that “being human basically means being productive

and any project that is not economically profitable, cannot afford to be fair and humane.” Nor should we forget that, in practice, a better QWL can improve employee performance (RODRIGUES, 194). Thus, QWL can constitute an essential element for improving the living conditions of the working individual and a means of increasing productivity.

Davis and Newstrom (1996) understand QWL as the favorable and unfavorable points of the work environment for people, without forgetting that the environment should be as good for the individual as for the economic health of the organization. However, Buono and Bowditch (1992, p.207), mainly relate QWL to the existence of organizational conditions and practices, as well as the visible effects that working conditions have on the welfare of people.

Similarly, Werther and Davis (1983, p.71) note that efforts to improve QWL actually try to make the jobs more productive and satisfying, considering that they are affected by factors such as supervision, working conditions, benefits, job payment and design. In the same vein, Rodrigues (1994) states that QWL can be understood as a means to improve the work environment, increase productivity and satisfaction, as well as a way to address problems of quality and productivity.

On the other hand, the ever fiercer pursuit of quality, productivity and competitiveness leads organizations to question where and when to invest - in machinery/equipment or training and valuing the worker. Accordingly, companies then begin to create alternatives to reconcile the goals of the employee with the organizational objectives, and one way is by improving QWL. While there are sever-

al theoreticians devoted to the study of QWL, in this article we will only apply the model put forward by Walton (1973), as this author assertively adjusts productivity and QWL by proposing eight conceptual categories that provide a model for analyzing the important characteristics of QWL, shown below.

Adequate and fair compensation: work is seen, primarily, as a means by which an individual earns a living. So the sale of this work must meet the subjective standard of the receiver or at least be socially satisfactory, with the wages received for certain work having an appropriate relationship with the wages received for other types of work, obtaining a fair and an adequate income. **Safe and healthy working conditions:** reasonable hours of work during standardized physical working conditions that prevent disease and injury as well as imposing age limits when the work is considered detrimental to the welfare of the people above or below a certain age. **The Opportunity to Use and Develop Human Capacities:** work has become extremely fragmented and controlled, so that in order for there to be potential use and development of human capacity some requirements are needed, such as job autonomy, multiple skills, perspectives and information, completed tasks and planning. **Opportunity for Growth and Security:** focuses more on the career than on opportunities, and to make the development process feasible, it becomes necessary to work with personal growth, the application of new skills, opportunities for advancement and job security. **Social Integration in the Work Organization:** some attributes are fundamental for a healthy social integration at work. This attributes are im-

portant to the identity and self-esteem of the individual: the absence prejudice related to color, race, sex, religion, nationality, lifestyle, physical appearance, advancement a sense of community and interpersonal sincerity. **Constitutionalism in the Work Organization:** are important elements that can enhance the QWL, such as rules that establish the rights and duties of workers. Some significant aspects are: the right to privacy, the right to express opinion, freedom of speech and adequate and fair treatment of issues pertaining to the work. **Work and the Total Life Space:** refers to the balanced relationship that should exist between work and other levels of the individual's life, with respect to the times and days of work, work demands, time for leisure and the family, as well as a professional development that does not produce negative effects on the personal life. **The Social Relevance of Work Life:** concerns the fact that many organizations do not act in a socially responsible manner, leading an increasing number of employees to depreciate the value of their work and careers, and so lose self-esteem (WALTON, 1973)

It is important to point out that Walton (1973) believes the relationship between productivity and QWL is not optimum for productivity when the peak score for QWL is perceived by the worker, but during its ascendance, and emphasizes that in the relationship between the QWL curves and productivity there are slopes that vary from one work set to another. Thus, it follows, in general, that gains in QWL result in a higher productivity and improved quality of products or services, given that according to Tannenbaum (1976, p. 78), "the success of the organization depends on the

willingness of its members to work assiduously and constructively in order to help them achieve their goals." Similarly, a job can be formulated so that it can be carried out to increase the opportunity to utilize and develop human skills and at the same time improve productivity.

Presentation and analysis of results of research on QWL in the light of clientelistic practices

Regarding the results of the survey, the first observation shows that most workers (95%) come from the drier areas of northeastern Brazil, specifically the interior of Ceará, where clientelistic/coronelistic practices predominate and labor relations are characterized both by the imposition of force and by dependence on the employer. Here, what stands out is that this choice of the profile of employee is not made at not random, but is a management decision, pertaining to the organization. However, by adopting this practice the company 'acquires' a degree of socially responsibility. What is noticeable is the almost unconditional obedience on the part of workers to management, which in their eyes are pretty much the 'saviors of the nation' which is a characteristic typically seen in clientelism.

There was a predominance of women (80%), all originating from the state of Ceará, where they faced harsh conditions and from which they migrated in search of better living conditions (44%) and employment (46%), and partly as a consequence, they remain subdued for fear losing their jobs, and consider that "anything is better than starving in the *sertão* (wilderness)" (words used by several of the interviewed women).

Most of these are young workers, aged up to 35 years, are not allowed to carry out anything beyond their routine job. Training and updating only occur when the company buys machines that use new technology. On the other hand, there is a school in the workplace in which they can participate during out of work hours. At this point, the fundamental contribution of enterprise in establishing a school that benefits all employees is recognized. Maybe that is why the factory in question has such a low level of illiteracy, only 14%, a rate considered low in the state of Ceará.

It is common to find people from the same family or from the neighborhood. This shows a clear company policy to hire people who live near the factories or are known by other staff. In the manufacturing sector, for example, all employees have relatives working in the organization and in some cases the entire family. This practice, which is typical of clientelism/*coronelismo*, almost unconditionally subordinates the subjects to the organization, because they fear they may undermine the whole family. Furthermore, it can also be seen that the organization relies on this type of management practice based on the knowledge of perception of the subjects regarding their prior quality of life. There once again, there is the basis for the choice of families from municipalities in the backlands of Ceará. The maintenance of positive perceptions on the part of the workers, as in clientelistic practices, is due to the constant recurrence to negative experiences and the reaffirmation of the current 'positive' situation. However, one of the tactics of clientelism is to make the subject, and his family, feel 'protected' by the employer. As with *coronelismo*, small houses are

being built around the factory where the employees of the organization reside. The scenario resembles a plantation with the main house (the company) and the shacks surrounding it, whose livelihood depends on the inhabitants of the 'big house'.

This dependent relationship ensures that more than 70% of employees in the company have been there for more than five years. Accordingly, it is worth noting that the turnover rate in the sector is not high, given the work conditions: 44 hours, a detailed search or examination of employees when leaving factory plant, with no right to basic food support, subsidized transport, childcare or health plan and a single minimum monthly wage. Practically no concerns or questions were expressed regarding capital-labor issues or worker exploitation. Instead, *hors concours* situations were observed.

For example, in Brazil, the Federal Constitution of 1988 mandates that in companies with more than 200 employees, there is a guaranteed right of the employees to elect a representative with the sole purpose of promoting right/legal understanding with the employers as well as enabling, even though it may not have been regulated, that wages are deposited directly in the employee's bank account or direct payment in the bank with the guarantee that workers will not lose any wages corresponding to the time required to go to the bank for purposes of receiving salary. If the company fails to meet any of these conditions, it must pay wages directly to the employee in the workplace.

There are no employee representatives, as the organization ensures that it is not necessary and thus, when the company has something to declare, often about some

action on the part of the employees that it considers inappropriate, it is done collectively, which causes some embarrassment. Like the coronel, the manager imposes himself not only through force but through ideological mechanisms that make the reality imperceptible to those that are dominated.

The same is true with respect to the payment of salaries: none of the conditions guaranteed by law has been observed. What actually happens is that the company pays by check and the staff are obliged to ask relatives or family members to go to the bank and cash the check, or lose a day's wages and go to the bank in person. However, there are frequent discussions among the employees about who will go to the bank on behalf of small groups and those groups take it on themselves to temporarily carry out the tasks of the one who goes to the bank. There is no apparent opposition or protest against the practice of the company, perhaps, due to ignorance of their rights. As noted earlier, this kind of civic and intellectual backwardness creates obstacles to the awareness of rights, which *coronelistic* practices take advantage of. That is, it is this typical *corpus* that allows *coronelistic* practices to be perpetuated even in multinational companies located in large urban centers in Northeastern Brazil. It is notable that, as in the large landed estates, the better paid jobs are reserved for males.

Such relations are found to be based on social vulnerability, want, misinformation and insecurity, and are implanted in such a way as to reproduce these conditions in order to perpetuate the consolidated positions at all levels. Managers, in turn, use these 'resources', misinformation, want, among others to continue such practices

and hide the asymmetry and hierarchical control on which such relations are inscribed.

Other aspects identified in the survey relate to the fulfillment of the above-mentioned QWL criteria and indicators. However, what we observe are perceptions of the workers about their QWL that are influenced by the internalization and acceptance of work relations typical of clientelistic relations. Traditionally legitimated relations, used to ensure that the organizational practices of the company propitiate the result desired by managers. The results pertaining to relevant criteria and their indicators are shown below.

Among the eight dimensions used to measure the quality of work life, the ones that achieved the best results were those on *Work and Total Life Space*, *Social Relevance of Life at Work*, *Working Conditions and Social Integration in the Company*, in that order. Regarding the most positive indicators, the following are highlighted: *hygiene in the facilities for personal use, cleanliness, order and tidiness in the factory, quick access to tools, equal distribution of tasks, availability of materials, quality of materials, relationship with colleagues, timekeeping when arriving and leaving work, a balance between work and social life, the image of the institution, corporate social responsibility and social responsibility by the workers.*

The criterion *Work and Total Life Space* obtained an excellent result. Around 74% of organization's employees considered themselves satisfied with the arrangement between their professional and personal life. That is, they believe there is a balance between work and social life. Therefore, there is a balance between the demands of professional life, including the entry and

exit time, and family life. Note that the interest in the work carried out in the company is limited, for the workers, to their physical space, i.e. as soon as the job is over they forget the institution until the next day. Perhaps because the activity is routine and does not require greater intellectual dedication or, especially since there is no possibility of participating in the smallest organizational decisions there is a lack of interest. There is some dissatisfaction among people aged up to 30 years of age, which can be explained by the youth and the consequent greater need to engage in a more active personal life/social. This becomes more apparent when comparing the satisfaction with the *Work and Total Life Space* in relation to the age of respondent, noting that the single people are the least satisfied. There is a noticeable similarity to the analysis made by Ramos (1989, p. 83), 'formal organizations are not the appropriate setting for the alienation and self-realization of individuals.' In the studied organization, the employees' perception is that professional activity is characterized as performance of activities detached from any factor related to subjective motivation, but to the performance of functions that provides pre-determined resources for personal and family survival under quite specific and rigid rules.

Regarding the criterion the *Social Relevance of Life at Work*, the result was very satisfactory, since almost 70% of the respondents have a good perception of the corporate social responsibility, the institution's image and social responsibility of the employees. In this criterion, the best results are related to the company's image. Seventy-seven percent (77%) of respondents are proud to be part of the organization which

employs them, in view of what the company represents for the community, particularly in employment generation. Besides the social responsibility with the community and the workers themselves, reflected the concern in solving the employment problems of the community. This item can be noted in the hiring policy, i.e., in general, people from the neighborhood where the factory is based are given preference when jobs are on offer and the company promotes and provides facilities for recreational activities for the children of employees.

When comparing the satisfaction with *Social Relevance of Life at Work* in relation to age and length of service, there is a notable tendency for it to improve with the age of the respondents, so that, the older the employee the better the perception of the company. The same is true with respect to length of service, the years of work seems to provide, in a sense, a more positive concept of the institution. Perhaps, this is because people, despite the complaints, recognize its importance for themselves and the community as a whole.

It is worth considering that such recognition exercises, in a retroactive movement, two functions: firstly, it perpetuates a paternalistic image of the company that re-fuels the belief that it is important to belong to ("be people of") a coronel, now in form of the enterprise that provides security and that requires, in return, subservience; secondly, a dependent position on the part of the workers, whose the importance in the perpetuation of this situation is overshadowed, because they employ other members of his family, as well as friends in which you trust and that in return should not "break" the contract of trust, but unconditionally accept the rules,

under the assumption that both will suffer the consequences. Such conditions enable the meeting of mutual interests that provides the foundation for the perpetuation of a certain pre-established practice.

The criterion *Working Conditions*, in turn, presents an average result. Slightly more than half of the respondents are actually satisfied with their situation. However, it can be seen that this is due to aspects such as hygiene in the areas designated for personal use, cleanliness, tidiness and order in the factory, equal distribution of tasks, quick access to tools, availability and quality of materials. All of which had an average acceptance rate of over 60%. However, fundamental factors leave much to be desired, making the dissatisfaction of the workers justifiable. These deal with issues related to collective and individual security innovations in methods, processes and tools, wages comparable to the market and the balance between the wage and the work, the effort and wear. The results for the last two are very low, with only 8% and 17% of the respondents indicating satisfaction, respectively. The most dissatisfied employees were those who performing the function of canteen assistant. Within the factory, this area really stands out from the others because there is little ventilation, too much noise and the fact the staff have to remain on their feet all the time. Among younger people, there is dissatisfaction with the indicators of the wage equilibrium with the market and the balance between wages and work, and the effort and wear. One factor that may explain their dissatisfaction is that, unlike the older employees, young people have experience other possibilities in the city and are not so marked by the experience of life suffered in the interior of the Northeast.

Regarding the criterion *Social Integration in the Enterprise*, although among those that obtained better results, only 40% of the workers expressed satisfaction. Although this category includes the indicator with the best rating in the survey, so that 91% of the people were satisfied with their *relationship with colleagues*; a little more than half of the people who answered the questionnaire begin to question the *superior's way of treating people* and the *lack of equal treatment*, as well as the type of *the relationship established with managers*. This process could be compared with the analysis proposed by Faoro (2001), whereby the processes of urbanization and industrialization, within the liberal democratic context, would result in the weakening of clientelism/*coronelismo*. Such a dynamic could be assumed given the diversity of factors with which the subjects have contact in the urban environment in contrast to the predominant situation in rural *coronelismo* in which, frequently, those people that depend on it are subjected to a condition similar to slavery.

Among the criteria and indicators with the most negative results were the criteria are related to *Chances for Growth and Permanent Security*, *Use and Development of skills*, *Constitutionalism* and *Fair and Adequate Compensation*. Of particular note among the worst rated indicators are aspects that deal with *freedom of expression and dissent*, *participatory management*, *equal participation* and *job security*. All these indices received scores for satisfaction well below 10% among the interviewed workers. These results suggest an appreciation of the importance of working conditions that value free will and negotiation, and which have provided the means for the development of modern societies. Once they have over-

come issues of survival, workers begin to demand, although tentatively, more opportunities to act within the company. Thus, it would be justifiable to think that such a search for growth, participation and security will probably gain strength, especially among the young.

The criterion *Chances for Growth and Permanent Security* registered the worst performance in the survey, only 9% of the workers expressed satisfaction. It should be remembered that this criterion of the quality of work life consists of the following indicators: *job security*, which showed a high level of uncertainty, since less than 10% of the respondents considered their situations stable, *career prospects and professional growth*, in which strangely 20% of respondents still believe that even with employment instability it is possible to progress in the company; *participatory management* that is practically nonexistent in the institution, with only 4% of discordance and *equality of participation*, which also scored almost nil (only 6% are satisfied), as there is not the slightest opening for employee participation in company decisions.

The criterion *Use and Development of Skills* presented a score of 21% satisfaction among the respondents, indicating that the employees believe they have few opportunities in their workplace to apply their knowledge and professional skills, as they are restricted to the execution of routine and repetitive tasks. It can be seen then that there is no freedom or independence in planning and implementing their work, i.e., only 14% of those surveyed indicated the level of *autonomy* was satisfactory. The employees also claimed they received no information on the evaluation of their work as a whole, as only 12% are satisfied this in-

dicator. Similarly, only 13% of respondents are satisfied with the support obtained from their immediate superior.

Regarding the criterion *Constitutionalism*, it can be stated that at least 30% of the professionals in the organization consider themselves satisfied with the institution. However, it is still a very low rate, considering the target population as a whole, so that 70% of the workers believe that the workers' rights do not apply within the company. Regarding the observance of the *fulfillment of obligations* of worker rights, they think themselves wronged, because they lack even basic food support, child care and subsidized transport. A mere 28% are satisfied, perhaps because they live next to the factory (which is common) or because they do not have small children. Moreover, the *rules are predetermined and disclosed* leaving no doubt and avoiding any *freedom of expression and dissent*. The overwhelming majority agrees with this, that is, 96% agree that the *rules are predetermined and disclosed*.

Finally, the criterion *Fair and Adequate Compensation*, which only 30% of the respondents are satisfied. It appears that *balance between wage and work*, is considered nonexistent and inexpressive, given that only 8% of the population surveyed are content with their situation. However, the surveyed company employees are aware that there is a *balance of benefits and salary with the market and internally* if only the workers are considered, which makes them dissatisfied with for the rest of the institution, since this rule does not affect all the positions in the company.

Given the above, it is easy to understand why most of these workers would not begin in the same organization again

(77%) and would not bring their child to this job (89%). After all, according to the workers themselves, they have many bad memories, such as reprimands, poor and unfair treatment, low earnings, work accidents, unwarranted suspension, unemployment of friends and repetitive work. The good memories, however, are restricted to the friendships made within the company and school located inside the factory. Therefore, it can be seen that to improve working conditions and satisfaction with the quality of work life of these people basic items such as those mentioned by the workers are needed: basic food basket, child care facilities, better meals, less pressure, more equality, slightly better pay, a health plan, that is, improvements that will bring some benefits for employees and therefore for the company.

Looking at an overall picture of the scores obtained for these categories and indicators, the workers' perception of their quality of work life is very good, considering the historical conditions that circumscribe them. Obviously, this result also is bound by the ideological content inherent in organizational practices, the production and maintenance of which are guaranteed in the selection of employees. In general, achieving the highest possible productivity levels is also part of that strategy, as is avoiding conflicts within the organization and hiring people from rural areas where they survive in precarious conditions and guaranteeing them a job, as can be seen from the survey, leads them feel grateful to the organization and, as a rule, they do not question their managers.

Implementation of such strategies in the state of Ceará (as in almost all regions of Latin America, particularly in Brazil)

is intended to integrate local characteristics and culture with the macro-structural purposes. Thus, on the one hand, the slightest financial improvement shown by the emerging industries represents a significant improvement in the living conditions of the former peasants, On the other hand, for the new coronels/employers who need to seek efficient production, the strategy of hiring former peasants has proved promising and clearly demonstrated the existence of clientelistic practices incorporated into the organizational practices of modern organizations, even a multinational, as is the case of the studied company, since the managers of the company are imbued in this type of clientelism which is widely found in Latin America.

CLOSING COMMENTS

It is worth noting that in attempting to analyze the regional culture in its relationship with the business rationale, it became apparent that there was a need to not only build analytical models that consider the loco-regional cultural reality, but reevaluate research conducted on the subject, at least with regard to the Northeast of Brazil.

What was observed was the predominance of clientelistic practices, which, like the rural relationships based on *coronelismo*, delegate to those in charge the possibility of improving in living conditions at work. That is, the organization uses management practices that contribute to the distortion, at least, of the perceptions of workers about the quality of work life. That distortion is achieved through a series of policies that standardize the mechanisms of hiring and managing people in order to perpetuate the status quo, as well as the relational dynamic.

However, with the emergence of democratic values associated with liberalism and, consequently, the incorporation of new practices related to urbanization and industrialization, *coronelismo* faces new challenges. As a result, there is an attempt to incorporate the liberal economic rationale, without, however, modifying the old relational forms, transforming the “new” businessman into a coronel reformed by the developmental processes and technology.

Ultimately, what one finds is the use of practices that are typical of the ‘old’ Brazilian clientelism/coronelismo, with new clothes, though sometimes not so new, in managing some of the largest organizations based in Brazil, mainly in northeastern Brazil. In contrast, the democratic values preached by liberalism causes cracks in that social structure that could lead to new ways of organizing political power. However, the potential

risk in such changes, is exchanging the way in which political power is exercised: from cultural prestige to the possession of resources, without there being any alternation of the main protagonists.

Despite the various definitions adopted by many scholars of QWL, it is believed that the organization is a contributor of paramount importance in determining the quality of work life of the individual. Especially if one considers that the greater the degree to which the institution satisfies the human needs of workers, the greater its contribution to the level of quality of life of people will be, inside and outside of work. We need to keep in mind, therefore, that even when quantitatively identifying the level of quality of life of men, it will remain replete with subjective components, inherent to each individual, which makes it unique and singular.

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