



Human Values, Quality of Working Life, and Professional Competences: Proposition of an Integrative Theoretical Model and Research Agenda

Valores Humanos, Qualidade de Vida no Trabalho e Competências Profissionais: Proposição de Modelo Teórico Integrativo e de Agenda de Pesquisa

Michelle Regina Santana Dutra 

Centro Universitário Unihorizontes (UNH), Programa de Pós-Graduação *Stricto Sensu* em Administração, Brasil, profa.michelledutra@gmail.com

Kely César Martins de Paiva 

Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG), Faculdade de Ciências Econômicas (FACE), Departamento de Ciências Administrativas (CAD), Centro de Pós-graduação e Pesquisa em Administração (CEPEAD), Brasil, kelypaiva@face.ufmg.br

Diogo Henrique Helal 

Fundação Joaquim Nabuco (FUNDAJ/MEC) and Universidade Federal de Pernambuco (UFPE), Departamento de Ciências Administrativas, Programa de Pós-Graduação em Administração (PROPAD/UFPE), Brasil, diogohh@yahoo.com.br

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Abstract

This theoretical essay explores three key themes — human values, quality of working life, and professional competencies — and aims to integrate them into a unified analytical model that supports a research agenda. The fulfillment of this agenda can contribute both theoretically and practically. It examines these constructs individually and in relation to one another, while also addressing methodological aspects, relevant contexts, and target audiences where the literature highlights gaps or calls for further investigation. To achieve this, a bibliographic review of each construct was conducted, incorporating recent and validated analytical models along with testable hypotheses. Studying these themes in an integrated manner provides a more comprehensive perspective on observed realities, particularly given the complexity of human relationships, especially in the context of labor relations. Furthermore, the insights generated from pursuing the proposed research agenda can shed light on human behavior within organizations, offering valuable data for enhancing policies and practices related to people management across diverse sectors of the labor market.

Keywords: Human values, Quality of working life, Professional competences, Integrative model, Organizational behavior, People management.

Resumo

Este ensaio teórico se debruça sobre três temas (valores humanos, qualidade de vida no trabalho e competências profissionais) e busca reuni-los em um modelo de análise integrado que fundamente uma agenda de pesquisa, cujo cumprimento possa contribuir tanto teórico quanto pragmaticamente. Tal agenda aborda os construtos, tanto individualmente, quanto por meio de suas conexões, além de aspectos metodológicos, contextos e públicos-alvo nos quais a literatura sinaliza carência de estudos ou necessidades de aprofundamentos. Para tanto, realizou-se um levantamento bibliográfico de cada construto, incluindo modelos de análise recentes e validados, bem como hipóteses passíveis de testes. Os estudos dessas temáticas de modo integrado promovem uma visão mais ampla das realidades observadas, tendo em vista a complexidade das relações humanas, ainda mais no contexto das relações laborais. Além disso, os conhecimentos advindos do cumprimento da agenda de pesquisa sugerida podem trazer à tona dados relativos ao comportamento humano em organizações, úteis para melhorias nas políticas e práticas de gestão de pessoas nas mais diversas esferas do mercado de trabalho.

Palavras-chave/Palabras clave: Valores humanos, Qualidade de vida no trabalho, Competências profissionais, Modelo integrativo, Comportamento organizacional, Gestão de pessoas.

1. Introduction

This essay aims to present an overview of the reflections and assumptions underlying the theories used to understand three key phenomena—human values, quality of working life, and professional competence. It explores how these theories evolve, intersect, and influence one another, ultimately proposing an integrative theoretical model and, consequently, a research agenda in the fields of organizational behavior and people management.

In the fields of organizational behavior and people management, early studies on human values emerged primarily in anthropology, sociology, and psychology (Morchain, 2015). Research on this topic can be divided into two key periods: the first, around 1930, marked by the work of Allport; and the second, around 1980, with contributions from Parsons, Rokeach, Hofstede, Triandis, and Schwartz, who examined values from distinct behavioral, cultural, and cross-cultural perspectives (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2022; Torres, Schwartz, & Nascimento, 2016; Morchain, 2015).

Currently, three main approaches dominate values studies: the psycho-lexical approach (Raad et al., 2016), the functional theory of values (Gouveia, 2019), and the theory of basic human values (Schwartz, 1992). To align with the epistemological principles of



the empirical-analytical framework, particularly within a functionalist sociological perspective, this essay adopts Schwartz's theory of basic human values as its theoretical foundation.

According to Porto (2019), traditional societies emphasized values related to order, hierarchy, and tradition, guiding individuals to act in accordance with social constructs. In contrast, modern societies prioritize the development of individual attributes, responsiveness to societal demands, and the promotion of personal well-being (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2022; Torres, Schwartz, & Nascimento, 2016). These modern values are conceptually linked to issues concerning quality of working life, as they influence workplace expectations and employee well-being.

In Brazil, for instance, the process of modernization has not occurred uniformly across society. While modern values shape the experiences of certain groups, such as formal urban workers, traditional or conservative values continue to predominate in other contexts, such as among informal rural workers. According to Tovolaro (2005), Brazil encompasses multiple coexisting societies, each undergoing varying degrees of transformation in their patterns of social differentiation and complexity over time. This perspective reinforces the understanding of modernity as a dynamic, multifaceted set of sociabilities rather than a singular or uniform phenomenon (Tovolaro, 2005).

At this point, we turn to Bauman (2014), who defines work as the primary and most socially acceptable means through which individuals can influence their quality of life. He argues that work serves as the fundamental moral norm guiding individual behavior and as the central framework through which people seek, plan, and shape their life trajectories and occupational skills. The perception of well-being is closely linked to both pleasant emotions and value recognition, which can be experienced individually or collectively (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2022; Ferreira, 2011). These perceptions, in turn, can influence various aspects of an individual's performance, particularly in relation to their professional competencies (Mami, 2020).

This brings us to the third key theme of this essay: Professional Competence. McClelland's studies, conducted in 1973, aimed to improve the selection process for job candidates by making it more precise and aligned with the demands of an increasingly competitive and dynamic labor market. His work also responded to the growing need for enhanced professional training (Campos & Abbad, 2019). Beyond job selection, other factors contribute to an individual's professional performance, with their competencies being recognized not only by themselves but also by various external audiences. These competencies can evolve and be reshaped over time. As Sagiv and Schwartz (2022) highlight, personal competence, when acknowledged as a value, can foster a sense of fulfillment and drive individuals toward continuous self-improvement.

Despite these conceptual connections, a review of national and international studies revealed no research that simultaneously examines all three themes. However, existing studies highlight, support, and suggest further exploration of these interrelationships. For example, research has established links between values and the perception of subjective well-being (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2022; Schwartz & Sortheix, 2018), underscoring the need for deeper investigation into how these constructs interact.

Building on these observations, this essay is guided by the following central question: How are human values, quality of working life, and professional competence interrelated? Accordingly, the primary objective of this article is to propose an integrated analytical model that serves as the foundation for a research agenda. The successful pursuit of this agenda can contribute both theoretically and practically, offering insights that enhance understanding and application in the field.

This article pursues the following specific objectives: a) Critically examine and analyze fundamental theories and frameworks related to human values, quality of working life, and professional competence, identifying their contributions and intersections; b) Develop an integrative theoretical model that connects these themes, demonstrating their causal relationships within organizational contexts; c) Identify critical gaps in the literature and propose a robust research agenda that addresses these constructs both individually and in relation to one another. This agenda will also consider methodological aspects, relevant contexts, and target audiences where existing studies are lacking or further exploration is needed.

To achieve this, we conduct an in-depth exploration of theoretical frameworks related to the three key constructs—human values, quality of working life, and professional competence. After identifying and elucidating the connections highlighted in the literature, we propose an integrative theoretical model. Following this, we outline the proposed research agenda and conclude with final reflections. The theoretical essay format has been widely adopted in management studies due to its potential for both theoretical and practical contributions, as demonstrated in the works of Torres, Paiva, and Barbosa (2024); Costa, Paiva, and Rodrigues (2022); Pereira, Paiva, and Irigaray (2021); Bottini, Paiva, and Gomes (2021); Vital and Paiva (2019); and Goldschmidt, Paiva, and Irigaray (2019).

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 About Human Values

Discussions on human values date back to antiquity, beginning with Plato, who viewed them as guiding principles for behavior. Later, Spinoza offered a different perspective, considering values as justifications for actions already taken (Morchain, 2015).



However, it was not until around 1930 that the study of human values gained prominence in academic discourse within the social sciences, particularly through the work of Allport (Torres, Schwartz, & Nascimento, 2016).

One of the leading scholars on the subject, Schwartz (1992), built upon the foundational work of Rokeach (1973) to further develop his reflections on human values. According to Schwartz, values correspond to universal demands inherent to the human species, including biological needs, the necessity of cooperation among individuals, and the need for societal continuity. Additionally, values are intertwined with the individual's perception of truth, as reflected in Adorno's assertion: "If truth has, in fact, a temporal core, then the historical content becomes, in its fullness, an integral moment of this truth" (Adorno, 2003, p. 26).

Schwartz (1994) further asserts that values fluctuate in importance over time. As a result, different generations tend to prioritize distinct values, shaped by the unique contexts they experience. This perspective aligns with the model proposed by Raad et al. (2016), which suggests that important values are reflected in the language and prevailing meanings of words. Studies applying this model have generated extensive lists of words and their associated meanings, enabling researchers to assess and deduce scales of value priorities and dominance. However, a deeper analysis of this approach is limited by the underlying interests and biases embedded within the model.

Another well-known model in Brazil is Gouveia's (2019) framework, which defines two primary functions of human values. The first function is to cognitively express human needs, balancing opportunities and threats. The second function is to guide human actions toward achieving personal, central, and social goals. The interplay between these functions results in six basic values and eighteen specific values. While Gouveia's model offers greater parsimony and integration compared to Schwartz's model, it does not differentiate between cultural and individual levels of analysis—a distinction that is essential for the development of the integrated model proposed in this study.

Regarding Schwartz's (1992) contributions, it is important to highlight that since the early 1980s, he has focused on developing the theory of basic human values. His model identifies 56 distinct ways of expressing values, which are categorized into 10 motivational types arranged within a circular structure, illustrating both integration and potential contradictions among values. Over time, this model has been refined through both Schwartz's own revisions and collaborative research. Notable contributions include studies by Schwartz et al. (2012), Torres, Schwartz, and Nascimento (2016), and Sagiv and Schwartz (2022). In the latter, the theory of values is further expanded, incorporating a revised structure of 19 refined values, adapted from the original model. This updated framework maintains the 10 basic values while introducing 4 higher-order values, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Summary of the 4 higher-order values, 10 basic values, and 19 refined values with motivational goals

Higher-order values	Basic Values	Refined Values
Openness to change	1. Self-direction: independent thought and action, choosing, creating, and exploring	1. Self-direction–Thought: freedom to cultivate one's own ideas and abilities
		2. Self-direction–Action: freedom to determine one's own actions
	2. Stimulation: excitement, novelty, and challenge in life	3. Stimulation (definition unchanged)
Self-enhancement	3. Hedonism: pleasure and sensuous gratification for oneself	4. Hedonism ^a (definition unchanged)
	4. Achievement: personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards	5. Achievement (definition unchanged)
	5. Power: social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources	6. Power–Dominance: power through exercising control over people
		7. Power–Resources: power through control of material and social resources
Conservation		8. Face ^b : maintaining one's public image and avoiding humiliation
	6. Security: safety, harmony, and stability of society, relationships, and self	9. Security–Personal: safety in one's immediate environment
		10. Security–Societal: safety and stability in the wider society
	7. Conformity: restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others or violate social expectations or norms	11. Conformity–Rules: compliance with rules, laws, and formal obligations
		12. Conformity–Interpersonal: avoidance of upsetting or harming other people



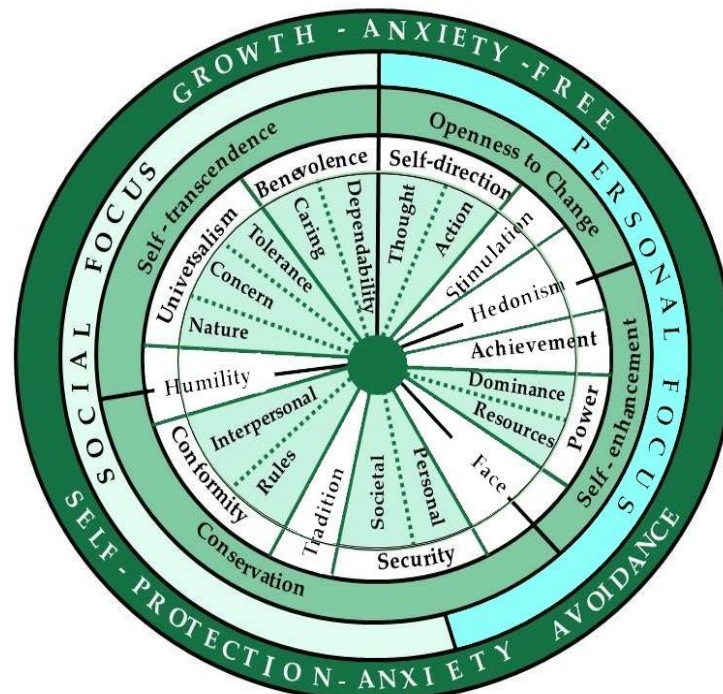
	8. Tradition: respect of, commitment to, and acceptance of the customs and ideas that traditional culture or religion provides	13. Tradition: maintaining and preserving cultural, family, or religious traditions
Self-transcendence	Undiscriminated	14. Humility: recognizing one's insignificance in the larger scheme of things
	9. Benevolence: preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact	15. Benevolence-Dependability: being a reliable and trustworthy member of the ingroup
		16. Benevolence-Caring: commitment to the welfare of ingroup members
	10. Universalism: understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of all people and of nature	17. Universalism-Concern: commitment to equality, justice, and protection for all people
		18. Universalism-Nature: preservation of the natural environment
		19. Universalism-Tolerance: acceptance and understanding of those who are different from oneself

Source: adapted from Sagiv & Schwartz (2022).

Note that:

- Hedonism is located on the border of openness-to-change and self-enhancement values, more frequently with openness to change;
 - Face is located on the border of self-enhancement and conservation values, more frequently with conservation;
 - Humility is located on the border of conservation and self-transcendence values, more frequently with self-transcendence.
- These poles are easily seen in Figure 2, along with the social focus and personal focus that such values reflect.

Figure 2. Sagiv and Schwartz's (2022) motivational circle of values



Source: Sagiv & Schwartz (2022, p. 524).

Schwartz's theory of basic human values proposes some main premises, namely:

- (1) Three requirements that universally identify them and guarantee human survival, all referring to the cognitive representations of the motives (goals) of each subject, which can be
 - (a) biological needs of the body,



(b) interactive needs for interpersonal coordination, and

(c) group needs for well-being and survival. Thus, each specific value of the model is the result of one or more of these three requirements.

(2) How the number of values is identified in the circular structure will determine whether these are compatible (similar behaviors) or conflicting (opposite behaviors) with the other identified values. The closer they are in the circle the more compatible any two values are, the more in conflict, the more distant.

To identify relevant studies on the topic, a Scopus search was conducted for articles published between 2012 and 2025 using the descriptors "Human Values" or "Personal Values." This search yielded 6,012 articles across 28 different academic disciplines, with a significant concentration in four key areas. The Social Sciences accounted for 2,477 articles, followed by Psychology with 1,264 articles, Business, Management, and Accounting with 1,137 articles, and Economics, Econometrics, and Finance with 403 articles. Since some articles were classified under multiple disciplines, these numbers reflect overlapping categorizations. The data indicate a growing scholarly interest in human values. In 2012, Scopus indexed 191 articles on the subject, a number that steadily increased to 399 in 2021 and 447 in 2024, with 40 articles already published by January 2025. This consistent rise in publications underscores the increasing academic recognition of human values as a significant area of study, particularly in relation to the organizational field and its broader intersections with other fields of study.

In general, an analysis of the keywords in the published articles reveals an integration of the themes "Human Values" or "Personal Values" with various topics within the field of organizational studies, as well as in diverse contexts and among different audiences. Notably, gender-related studies include female (410 articles) and male (385 articles) perspectives, while age-related research encompasses adults (347 articles), young adults (134 articles), middle-aged individuals (107 articles), and aged individuals (75 articles). Other significant themes associated with human values include motivation (140 articles), human experimentation (173 articles), personality (83 articles), education (98 articles), sustainability (115 articles), culture (82 articles), religion (50 articles), mental health (46 articles), depression (44 articles), family (33 articles), quality of life (42 articles), satisfaction (33 articles), and consumer behavior (29 articles). The prominence of these keywords highlights the broad interdisciplinary relevance of human values and underscores the importance of exploring their potential connections with quality of working life, a topic that will be examined in the following section.

The most prominent authors in the field include Gouveia, V. V. (29 articles) and Schwartz, S. H. (25 articles), followed by Ciecuch, J. (23 articles) and Davidov, E. (22 articles). In terms of scientific output, the United States leads with 873 published articles, followed by the United Kingdom with 395 articles. Brazil ranks eighth, contributing 173 articles to the academic discussion on human values. The institutions with the highest number of publications on this topic are HSE University (National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow, Russia) with 57 articles, and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel, with 56 articles. Among the researchers affiliated with the latter, Professor Emeritus Shalom H. Schwartz stands out as the leading figure behind the human values model adopted in this integrative framework proposal.

2.2 About quality of working life

Academic research on Quality of Working Life (QWL) began in the mid-1960s when executives of large corporations in Europe (particularly in France and Belgium) and the United States recognized that employees who were more motivated and satisfied with their work tended to be more productive and contributed to greater financial returns for their companies. This understanding linked QWL to the achievement of professional competence (Walton, 1973). However, distinct differences emerged between the European and American approaches to QWL. The European perspective places greater emphasis on the worker, considering their physical and psychological well-being and, potentially, their human values. In contrast, the American approach is more focused on work itself, prioritizing aspects such as effectiveness, efficiency, and productivity (Rozestraten, 2005).

This study adopts the European approach to Quality of Working Life (QWL), recognizing that an individual's perception of QWL is inextricably linked to their pursuit of balance between work and personal life. From their extensive experience in the workplace, employees can develop a sense of personal satisfaction that is directly connected to their performance within the organizational environment (Gramms & Lotz, 2017; Said & Kamel, 2023). Job boredom may be considered the opposite, as it is negatively associated with satisfaction and employee performance (Lee & Wetzel, 2023; Odunjo-Saka et al., 2023).

According to Ferreira (2011), the management of quality of working life should contribute to the achievement of surveillance in health and security; psychosocial assistance to workers; and promotion of well-being at work. However, the fact that work is seen as a source of pleasure automatically leads to a feeling in the worker of giving back, being useful, being recognized by peers and superiors, and keeping a work engagement, expanding organizational results. With the advances in the studies, Ferreira (2011) presented a model that includes quality of working life and the risks of illness in a continuum of workers' representations that go through the human work costs and the organizational culture to measure well-being and malaise at work. In general, these poles



represent pleasant or unpleasant feelings at work. They represent individual or collective manifestations of isolated or associated feelings that characterize these extremes, namely:

- (1) Well-being:
 - a) Joy, friendship, cheerfulness, confidence, comfort, willingness;
 - b) Happiness, harmony, justice, freedom, pleasure, respect
 - c) Equity, balance, esteem, satisfaction, security, sympathy;
- (2) Malaise:
 - a) Boredom, dislike, disgust, embarrassment, contrariness, discontent;
 - b) Disrespect, awkwardness, annoyance, indisposition, belittling, offense;
 - c) Disappointment, discouragement, discomfort, disturbance, repugnance, tedium.

According to the author, the analysis of the main factors and the elements that integrate them as facets of QWL are at the origin of each experience or representation at work and are configured as a powerful tool for reading the environment and planning actions. This model includes 5 factors and 20 elements, summarized in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Main factors and elements that integrate QWL

Factors	Elements	Description
Working Conditions and Organizational Support	Architectural Equipment	flooring; walls, ceiling; doors; windows; decoration; physical arrangements, <i>layouts</i>
	Physical Environment	workspaces; lighting; temperature; ventilation; acoustics
	Instrument Set	Tools, machines; apparatus, information devices; documentation; workstations; complementary furniture (e.g. cabinets)
	Raw Material	Materials, databases
	Organizational Support	Information; supplies; technologies; compensation, training, and benefits policies
Labor Organization	Division of Labor	Hierarchical; technical; social
	Mission, Purpose, and Organizational Goals	Quality and quantity; parametric
	Prescribed Work	Planning; tasks; types and tasks contents; formal and informal rules; technical procedures; deadlines
	Working Periods	Workday (time, shifts); breaks; vacations; flexibility
	Labor Procedure	Cycles; stages; expected flow; pressure types
	Labor Management	Controls; supervision; inspection; discipline
	Behavior Standard	Knowledge; attitudes; anticipated skills; hygiene; attire/dress.
Socioprofessional Labor Relations	Hierarchical Relationships	Immediate supervisor; senior managers
	Peer Relations	Co-workers; team members
	External Relations	Citizens-users of public services; clients and consumers of private products and services
Acknowledgment and Professional Growth	Acknowledgment	Of the work done, commitment, dedication; of the hierarchy (immediate boss and superiors); of the institution; of the citizen-users, clients, and consumers; of society
	Professional Growth	Use of creativity; skills development; training; opportunities; incentives; equity; careers
Work-Social Life Link	Meaning of Work	Pleasure; well-being; appreciation of the time spent in the Company; feeling of social usefulness; healthy productivity
	Importance of the Employer	Personal meaning; professional meaning; family meaning; social meaning
	Social Life	Work-home relationship; work-family relationship; work-friends relationship; work-leisure relationship; work-society relationship

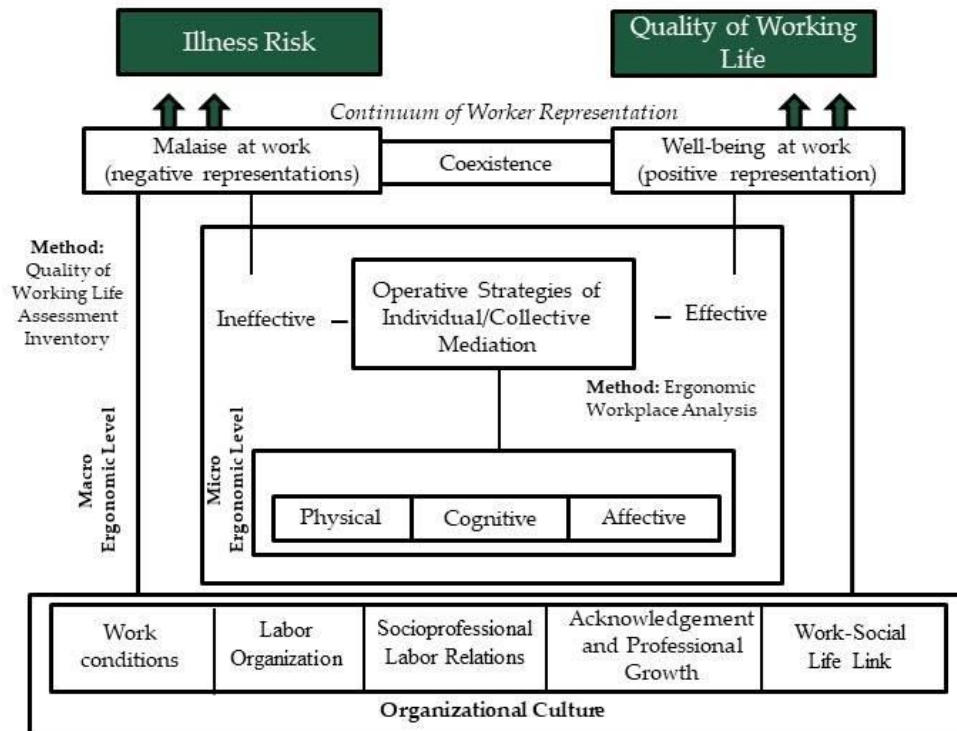
Source: adapted from Ferreira (2011).

Crosscutting these factors is the organizational culture, which configures the workspace where other elements are present, such as language and symbolism, visible behaviors, values shared in the Company, ideological beliefs, and the rites and rituals that happen. In this perspective, the organizational culture aligns with the other factors and can be evaluated at a level called by the author as macro ergonomic, measurable by the Quality of Working Life Assessment Inventory (IA-QVT), validated in his studies. This micro-level configures a work that can be perceived and experienced in the continuum of the well-being and discomfort poles,



promoting quality of working life and/or the risks of getting sick, respectively. Intermediating this relationship are, in the perspective of Ferreira (2011), the operative strategies of individual/collective mediation, which happen at the micro ergonomic level and have a physical, cognitive and affective nature. They are measurable through the Ergonomic Workplace Analysis (AET) developed and validated by the author. Figure 4 allows us to visualize this model.

Figure 4: Theoretical-Methodological Model for Quality of Working Life (QWL) Assessment



Source: Ferreira (2011:178).

Similarly to the first theme, seeking to identify studies on QWL, an investigation was conducted in *Scopus* between 2012 and 2025 with the descriptors "Quality of Working Life" or "QWL" and obtained as a return 1,210 articles covering 28 areas of academic activities; however, when filtering by the areas "Social Sciences" (330 articles), "Business, Management and Accounting" (348), "Economics, Econometrics and Finance" (84) and "Psychology" (110), 646 published articles were identified, considering that an article can be classified in more than one area. As in "Human Values" and "Personal Values", the four areas selected in the QWL theme represent more than half of the articles developed throughout the collection. Since 2012, the total number of articles available on Scopus was 18; in 2021, there were 65; in 2024, there were 78; and, in January 2025, there were already 3 works. Once again, the evolution in publications and, therefore, in research signals recognition of the relevance of QWL for the organizational field and its intersections with other fields of study.

As for some of the themes associated with QWL in the 646 articles highlighted in the keywords, again issues related to gender, male (27 articles) and female (29); age issues, adult (29) and young adult (6); territory issues, India (13), Malaysia (10), Canada (6), Thailand (5), Iran (5), Finland (5), Brazil (5); internal labor issues, job satisfaction (110), working conditions (29), organizational commitment (24), work-life balance (21), work environment (19), productivity (19), workplace (15), job stress (14) and job performance (14), organizational culture (7), decent work (5); external labor issues, employment (14), perception (12), psychological capital (11), well-being (10), mental health (6) and happiness at work (4); individual issues, turnover intention (14), perception (12), psychological capital (11), well-being (10), mental health (6) and happiness at work (4); and methodological issues, such as questionnaire (18), structural equation modeling (13), cross-sectional study (12), exploratory factor analysis (6) and confirmatory factor analysis (6). Points that strengthen the association between values and competence should also be noted, hence its proposition in the integrated analysis model of this essay.

On the topic of QWL, the authors who stand out the most are Hermawati, A. (10 articles); Singhapakdi, A., and Sirgy, M. J. (7 articles each); and Ferreira, M. C. (4 articles). India leads the number of publications (111 articles), followed by the United States of America (61 articles); in this ranking, Brazil occupies the sixth position (37 articles). The institutions with the highest frequency of author affiliation are Tampere University, in Finland, and the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, based in the United States



of America, both with 10 publications; The University of Brasília, in Brazil, to which professor Mário César Ferreira is affiliated, has 6 publications. It should be noted that Ferreira is the author of the QWL model adopted in this integrative model proposal.

2.3 About professional competences

According to Campos and Abbad (2019), the concept of competence in the work scenario began to be adopted in the 1970s, whose precursor was McClelland and his study on biases in professional selection processes and standards of "best" performance at work or success in professional life. Based on the understanding that since childhood a subject is inserted in a reading of the world full of impressions that provokes his actions, Freitas (2001) points out that the individual's relationship with the world around them has its beginning through mimesis and remains to imitate behaviors to be inserted into different life spheres and developing their knowledge and rationality (Adorno, 2003).

Therefore, competence is not restricted to theoretical knowledge "contained" in an individual and not even found "wrapped up in tasks" (Fleury & Fleury, 2004) or work/departamental environments (Schwartz & Sortheix, 2018).

The conception that is intended to be used in this essay transitions between the North American model - which understands that competence is expressed by knowledge, skills, motivations, and traits that result in efficiency or superior performance at work - and the French model, which treats the subject as mobilization of competence by the worker itself in its work context and a capacity for action when faced with unforeseen events (Zarifian, 2001; Boterf, 2003) – as synthesized by Dutra (2004).

This perception of competence as a process of mobilization of differentiated knowledge that presents results valued by the subject itself and by others (the process of delivery and delivery *per se*) is in line with Cheetham and Chivers's (1996, 2000, 2005) perception. These authors presented the professional competence in the perception of the social actors involved in the work, considering procedural and dynamic aspects in the individual, collective and social charges, as well as the macro, micro, and partial results, and feeding back the process in their daily behaviors, in their environment and their work context. In Brazil, this model was adapted by Paiva (2007), who added a dimension or component of competence (the political, consisting of political-relational knowledge) to the four of the original model (cognitive, consisting of theoretical knowledge, job qualifications; functional, consisting of applied knowledge of the performance of tasks; behavioral-personal, personal and socio-relational knowledge; and ethical, consisting of axiological knowledge), as can be seen in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Paiva's (2007) Theoretical and conceptual model of Professional Competences



Source: adapted from Paiva (2007).

Similarly to the previous constructs, the survey in the Scopus database for "professional competence" or "work competence" or "job competence" between 2012 and 2025 resulted in the identification of 14,689 articles in 28 areas and 4,771 articles in the areas "Social Sciences" (3,830 articles), "Business, Management and Accounting" (445), "Economics, Econometrics and Finance" (0) and "Psychology" (1,097). Since 2012, the total number of articles available on Scopus was 294; in 2021, there were 312; in 2024, there were 357; and, in January 2025, there were already 30 articles. It is worth noting that 8,715 and 2,042 of the articles published on professional competence in the period under review were from the fields of medicine and nursing, respectively.

As for the keywords cataloged in those 4,771 articles, it is noteworthy that: they are related to human issues (4,210 articles) and their Human Experiment (374); gender issues, female (1,138) and male (1,108); age issues, adult (973), middle-aged (363), young



adult (290), aged (160), adolescent (129); internal work issues, organization and management (318), learning (311), standards (287), training (194), personnel management (167), professional development (197), communication (142), program evaluation (140), job satisfaction (61); social issues, social behavior (63); education issues, education (891) and university (163); and personal issues, curriculum (410), psychological aspect (88), and mental health (64).

Still within the four areas selected for analysis, it is observed that in the topic of Professional Competences, the authors that stand out the most are König, J. (19 articles), Kaiser, G. (13 articles), Taylor, J.M. The United States of America (1,084 articles) leads the publications indexed in Scopus, by country, followed by Russia (575 articles), the United Kingdom (362 articles) and Germany (292 articles) in publications; In this ranking, Brazil occupies 15th position, with 93 complete articles published on professional competences. The institutions with the highest number of publications are Kazan Federal University (101 articles), based in Russia, Universiteit Maastricht (47 articles), in the Netherlands, Harvard Medical School (42 articles), in the United States of America, and University of Toronto (42 articles), Canada.

Given these findings and the concepts and models presented above, the following theoretical connections are aligned.

3. Relations between human values, quality of working life, and professional competence

Despite national and international studies that indicate integrations of the themes addressed, no work was found that jointly contemplated theoretical or methodological discussions on human values, quality of working life, and professional competence. However, it was identified in Scopus that an increasing number of studies with themes separately, especially in 2019, added 2,396 publications on human values or personal values, 402 publications on quality of working life, and 2,204 publications on professional competence (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Number of publications in Scopus by year from 2012 to 2025

Human Values		Professional Competence		Quality of Working Life	
Year	Academic Paper	Year	Academic Paper	Year	Academic Paper
2012	191	2012	294	2012	18
2013	198	2013	352	2013	31
2014	205	2014	314	2014	39
2015	227	2015	388	2015	39
2016	266	2016	419	2016	43
2017	268	2017	357	2017	36
2018	262	2018	443	2018	38
2019	337	2019	454	2019	79
2020	390	2020	424	2020	59
2021	399	2021	312	2021	65
2022	385	2022	313	2022	65
2023	398	2023	314	2023	53
2024	447	2024	357	2024	78
2025	40	2025	30	2025	3
4013		4771		646	

Source: survey data

Certainly, the COVID-19 pandemic has and will have impacts on such numbers since there is a period between the research being conducted and the publications *per se*.

On the other hand, among the recent studies, two stand out, the first one by Ueno (2020), which relates values and knowledge, specifically as personal, social, professional, and international competence, comparing data between Brazil, Italy, and Japan. The author leads her research by explaining the role of education in the development of a country, frequently using the terms "knowing how to be", "responsibility", "autonomy", "practical knowledge", "work", "quality of work", "creativity", and "pedagogy and education".

However, Lechner, Beierlein, Davidov and Schwartz (2024) showed, through their research in Germany, that human values influence finances, leisure, work and political orientation but have little relationship with the perception of well-being, with self-worth even being negatively associated with happiness. These findings suggest that axiological characteristics can support different perceptions regarding individuals' levels of well-being, reinforcing the need for a model that integrates human values and QWL.



The second paper by Sagiv and Schwartz (2022) weighs conflict and compatibility, as well as the origins of priorities and/or changes in values over time, evidence linking personality traits and subjective well-being, and implications about possible value differences. Here, the connection between values and perceived subjective well-being is highlighted (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2022; Schwartz & Sortheix, 2018; Sagiv, Rocca & Oppenheim-Weller, 2015), with the understanding that values that express intrinsic motives (basic human needs such as autonomy, relationship, and competence) are healthy and extrinsic ones (social approval and material gain) lead to the subjective well-being denial. In this perception, values would have a direct relationship and influence on aspects of quality of working life and professional competence.

Moreover, other scholars, such as Sagiv, Roccas and Oppenheim-Weller (2015) and Schwartz and Sortheix (2018), from research conducted in Argentina, Bulgaria, Finland, Israel, and the United States in work environments and academic departments, human and environmental values affect subjective well-being. In this sense, people compare their perceptions, sensations, and beliefs to those of others, resulting in data pointing to a clear divide between the groups. Thus, values and knowledge are presented according to their belonging to a group (Morchain, 2015). Added to this is the contribution of Ueno (2020), who stresses that the development of human values and knowledge are influenced by access or not to a quality education, which, in turn, has repercussions on the economic and social development of a country and the perception and condition of subject life.

Such aspects can also be seen in the research by Gazi, Al Masud, Yusof, Islam, Rahman, & Wang (2024), which aimed to investigate the drivers of the quality of working life in the industrial workforce in a developing country, Bangladesh. Using the partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) technique, the data revealed that aspects such as work environment, organizational climate, relationships and cooperation, remuneration and rewards, resource adequacy, job autonomy, job satisfaction and security, as well as culture organizational, directly impact QWL, in terms of attitudes and behaviors of joy and optimism, commitment to the organization, stress-free and physically healthy and productive life.

In a similar sense, the study of competences acquired by nursing students trained at universities public and private, in Iran, carried out by Purabdollah, Zamanzadeh, Ghahramanian, Valizadeh, Ghasempour, & Mousavi (2025), indicates that the lack of infrastructure in these organizations can compromise clinical education, suggesting a relationship between the development of professional competence and the perception of working conditions, which is one of the dimensions of quality of life at work. Another study carried out in Iran with managers from all hierarchical levels of hospital organizations, authored by Liang and Kakemam (2025), found that difficulties directly related to aspects of QWL (conflict between colleagues and teams, performance of employees, loss of qualified personnel and confrontation with supervisors) were connected to timid perceptions of demonstrating professional skills. Such findings transcend cultural particularities of that country, giving rise to other investigations that connect such themes.

In addition to formal education, other factors that may influence this process are also present. In this sense, Schwartz and Rubel (2005) point out that the perception of values can have variations when facing differences in gender, age, and culture, corroborating the studies of Hofstede (1991), who announced differences between men and women in different societies, and those of Borlido (2011), enlightening about the intermediations of social interactions be it family, school and/or work on human actions. For Borlido (2011), human values encourage individual attitudes and reflective behaviors and can be influenced by social class, defined by conviviality, schooling, power, and information received and interpreted.

On the other hand, there is research that indicates that the perception of QWL can become homogeneous in the face of a greater cause, uniting people with similar values. Oweidat, Omari, ALBashtawy, Saleh, Alrahbeni, Al-Mugheed, & Alsheikh (2024) point out that, in refugee camps, the humanitarian mission reduces differences in QWL between nurses, regardless of individual or organizational factors. In these contexts, motivation and professional satisfaction come from the commitment to caring for vulnerable populations. Homogeneity in the workforce minimizes variations in QWL, reinforcing the relevance of this essay and studies that integrate human values, QWL and professional competences.

Thus, cultural and cross-cultural, familial and circumstantial aspects, as well as life events and the individual's own career choices influence how they perceive their level of well-being in their work. For example, undergraduate business students cited by Sagiv and Schwartz (2022) tend to have a greater attachment to the value of "power" because it is equivalent to their professional ethos. In the organizational environment, personal values may favor the application of knowledge in decision-making processes, even more so if there is compatibility between those shared by managers and leaders and organizational values (Pantoja, Porto, Mourão, & Borges-Andrade, 2005), which is directly linked to professional competence.

In a similar sense, the research by Hermawati, Sembhodo and Wulandari (2024) aimed to identify relationships between individual performance (marketing-oriented), innovation culture and quality of work life (QWL). It was carried out in the tourism sector, based on a sample of employees from small and medium enterprises (SMEs), in the East Java region, Indonesia. Also using a sophisticated statistical technique - structural equation modeling of partial least squares (PLS-SEM) - for the data analysis, It was found that individual performance was significantly influenced by the culture of innovation and QWL, in addition, that marketing performance



was significantly influenced by individual performance, revealing relationships between values (which support the culture of innovation), QWL and professional performance.

Regarding their application in the day-to-day work, competence has been increasingly demanded from the workers, such as being dynamic, multitasking, having high performance, etc. In the face of this, it is not only the body that feels the impacts of the frenetic pace of work that technological innovations, globalization, and the growth of markets impose on daily life and, in this conjunction, the one who does not surrender to the demands for flexibility and adaptability may be considered useless (Ronchi, Bandeira, Melo-Jr., & Oliveira, 2016), that is, not having their competence recognized and valued by others. Consequently, the mind suffers, hence the importance of a psychosomatic approach at work integrated with health issues in its varied dimensions, i.e., social, physical, and mental (Ueno, 2020). Questions about resilience at the individual level assume some prominence in this context (Goldschmidt, Paiva & Irigaray, 2019), since preparing for professional demands implies reflection in and on everyday actions (Cheetham & Chivers, 1996, 2000, 2005; Paiva, 2007). Thus, better results and development of competence, as well as a perception of well-being, health, motivation, and productive behaviors can also be noticed after organizational actions that strengthen the bond between worker and Company (Siqueira & Gomide-Jr., 2014). Note, once again, a connection between competence and quality of working life.

It is also expressed in Souza and Bernardo's approach (2019), for whom the way work is organized, experienced, and charged is directly related to the expressions of human sufferings and consequently malaise at work. Moreover, work plays an important role in health, self-esteem, and well-being among human beings since work motivation is related to performance or survival and the achievement of personal accomplishments, benefiting the individual and society (Viegas, Oliveira & Falcone, 2019).

However, for competence to be developed in the work context, the Company is expected to articulate existing elements and create an environment that contributes to the well-being and conservation of workers' values (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2022; Ferreira, 2011; Paiva, 2007). However, being able to perform functions with increasingly better results does not come only from professional competence, but also from the edification of the human condition itself (Vidor, 2014), reinforcing the argument of personal values as antecedents of quality of working life and professional competence.

Given these connections pointed out by the literature, an integrative conceptual model is proposed.

4. Presentation of the integrative conceptual model

Given the conceptual adherences mentioned above, an integrative model of analysis of the three themes is proposed, as presented by Sagiv and Schwartz (2022), Ferreira (2011), and Paiva (2007). Some observations are necessary, such as the issue of modernity in Brazil. These movements did not occur symmetrically between urban and rural scenarios (Tovolaro, 2005), thus there are current situations in which conservative and traditional values prevail and for these, the model does not apply, for example, traditional communities, quilombolas, riverine, indigenous, as well as the rural informal worker.

As for Sagiv and Schwartz's (2022) human values, Self-direction–Thought inserted in the higher-order "openness to change" can notice that the search for freedom to build one's abilities refers to the development of probable competence (Paiva, 2007), likewise the achievement and the power of mastery contained in self-enhancement highlight the recognition of competence by others or the search for the competence that are socially required for the person to feel that he/she has achieved personal success and, respectively, the necessary and validated competence for the performance of control over the activities of others (Paiva, 2007).

Still, regarding Sagiv and Schwartz's (2022) model of human values, it is possible to highlight the intersections with quality of working life when personal security and social security seek micro and macro stability. On the other hand, benevolence-reliability, benevolence-care, and universalism, both of which are self-transcending, seek well-being in human relationships and with nature. The perception of values in the work environment can result in pleasant feelings and, consequently, well-being at work (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2022; Ferreira, 2011).

For Ferreira's (2011) model of quality of working life, it is noted that feelings of comfort, harmony, justice, respect, and security resemble conservation values; feelings of freedom and pleasure, in turn, resemble openness to change values; and feelings of fairness and balance resemble Sagiv and Schwartz's (2022) values of self-transcendence. The five main factors that guide the quality of working life by Ferreira (2011) in well-being or malaise also allude to values since control, arrangements, relationships with the labor environment and subjects, recognition, competence, and pleasure are addressed in Sagiv and Schwartz (2022).

Specifically about the professional competence model of Paiva (2007), the assessed knowledge also shows similarities with the two other themes studied, so it is believed that the personal and relational knowledge (the behavioral component) is mentioned in a certain way by Ferreira (2011) and by Sagiv and Schwartz (2022) in humility, benevolence, and universalism (self-transcendence) and for security (conservation); the axiological knowledge (ethical component), *a priori*, is based on human rights; the political-relational knowledge (political component) about the four higher-order values and quality of working life, focusing on socio-



professional labor relations and acknowledgment and professional growth; and, the theoretical knowledge, qualifications for the job, and applied knowledge of task accomplishment (cognitive and functional components), may refer to possible openings to change and self-enhancement (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2022; Paiva, 2007). Moreover, human values and professional competence show the impact of investments at a country's micro and macro levels and its positioning, whether in the labor, commercial, international, social, personal, educational, or other spheres (Mami, 2020).

Considering the above, it is possible to outline three hypotheses about the relationship between human values, QWL and professional competences, namely:

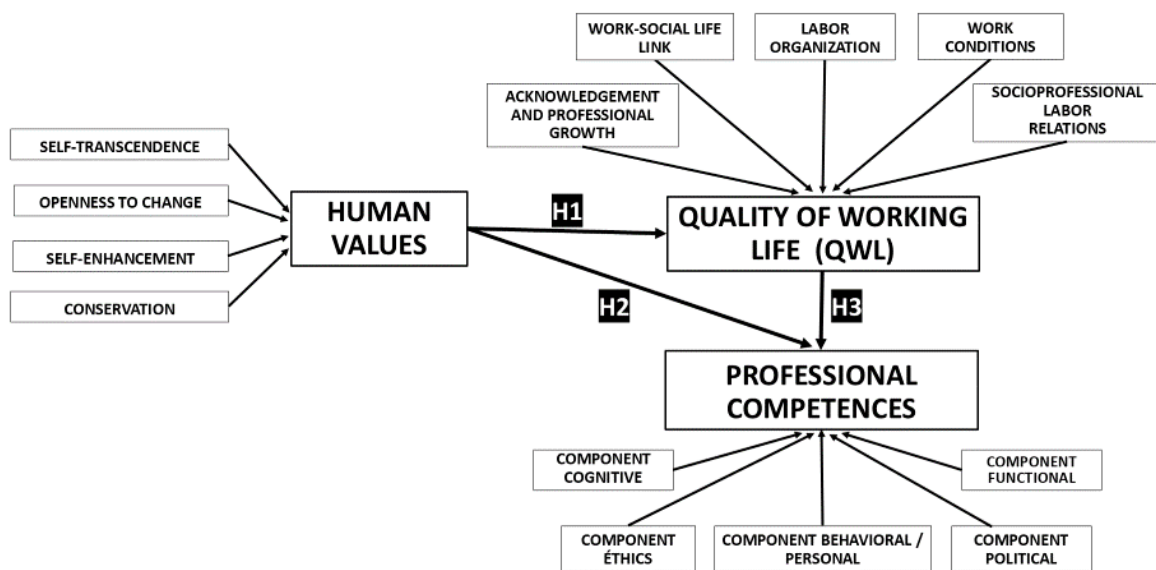
H1: Human Values have a positive impact on the QWL perceived by workers.

H2: Human Values have a positive impact on the development of Professional Competences of workers.

H3: Perceptions of QWL have a positive impact on the development of Professional Competences of workers.

Given the above, we propose an integrative conceptual model as shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Integrated analysis model for human values, QWL, and professional competence



Source: own elaboration.

It is noteworthy that this model suggests associations and impacts, but it is necessary to remain open to relationships in different ways, based on empirical data. Once the complexity and incompleteness of each worker-subject and their work reality are recognized, perceptions can change over time, with this flexibility also being one of the differences of this model and the theories adopted. Considering this model and aiming for its validation and improvement, suggestions for future research were outlined.

5. Research Perspectives

This study presents an integrative model that connects human values, quality of working life (QWL), and professional competence, offering a strong foundation for future research. Several theoretical and methodological avenues emerge from this framework, which can be explored through both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

Regarding human values, the Theory of Basic Values (Schwartz et al., 2012; Sagiv & Schwartz, 2022) serves as a key reference, having undergone various refinements. In Brazil, Paiva, Rocha, and Fujihara (2018) validated a scale aligned with Schwartz's model, though recent updates (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2022) suggest further epistemological exploration. Future research could refine these theories while offering practical insights for organizations, helping them align workers' personal values with job roles and organizational cultures.

For QWL, Ferreira's (2011) model provides a widely used theoretical basis, particularly in public-sector studies (Fernandes & Ferreira, 2015; Klein, Pereira, & Lemos, 2019). However, applying it to private and third-sector organizations could yield valuable insights into how well-being at work influences productivity, engagement, and job satisfaction. Research could also examine the impact of workplace interventions designed to enhance QWL, contributing both theoretically (by refining QWL constructs) and pragmatically (by guiding organizational policies).



With regard to professional competence, Paiva's (2007) framework has been widely applied in different occupational groups (Barbosa, Paiva, & Mendonça, 2018; Barros, Paiva, & Melo, 2017). A validated scale (Paiva, Rocha, & Fujihara, 2018) has also been adapted for young workers (Rocha, 2021), yet further revalidation is needed for different professional and cultural contexts. Exploring competence as a dynamic process influenced by QWL and human values could refine existing models, offering new insights for HRM practices such as recruitment, career development, and performance evaluation.

Methodologically, triangulation (Collis & Hussey, 2005) offers a promising approach, combining quantitative techniques (e.g., structural equation modeling for hypothesis testing) with qualitative methods (e.g., discourse analysis to explore workers' perceptions). Quantitative research could focus on factor analyses and regression models to assess relationships between human values, QWL, and competence, while qualitative studies could explore context-specific insights into how professionals experience and interpret these constructs.

Moreover, cross-cultural and diversity research should be prioritized. Future studies could compare public vs. private sector employees, explore differences based on gender, age, socioeconomic status, and professional backgrounds, and assess how employment types (e.g., freelancers, civil servants, corporate employees) influence perceptions of QWL and competence development. Certain fields—healthcare, education, and public safety—have received more academic attention, but comparisons across multiple industries and labor environments would further validate the integrative model.

By expanding this research agenda, future studies can enhance theoretical frameworks, provide empirical validation, and offer practical solutions for organizations aiming to improve employee well-being, professional development, and workplace policies.

6. Theoretical Contributions

This study advances theoretical discussions by integrating three critical constructs—human values, QWL, and professional competence—into a unified framework. While these themes have been explored separately, their interconnection has been largely overlooked. By establishing theoretical linkages, this research contributes to organizational behavior, human resource management (HRM), and psychology, offering new perspectives on how personal values influence workplace well-being and career development.

A significant contribution is the extension of Schwartz's Theory of Basic Human Values (1992, 2022) to organizational settings. While Schwartz's model has been extensively applied in cultural psychology, its relevance to workplace behaviors and professional growth remains underexplored. This study bridges that gap, demonstrating how values such as self-transcendence, conservation, and openness to change shape work engagement, well-being, and career progression. Moreover, it aligns with self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) by showing that intrinsic values drive job satisfaction, motivation, and competence development, reinforcing the connection between personal values and workplace experiences.

In relation to QWL, this study strengthens the European perspective, which prioritizes worker well-being, psychosocial support, and intrinsic job satisfaction over performance-based measures. Drawing on Ferreira's (2011) model, it underscores the importance of value congruence in organizational environments, offering a new theoretical pathway for understanding how workplace culture influences engagement, well-being, and productivity.

Additionally, this study broadens competence-based theories by integrating Paiva's (2007) professional competence model with human values and QWL. Traditional competence frameworks emphasize technical knowledge and skills, but this research highlights competence's behavioral, ethical, and relational dimensions. It suggests that professional competence is not merely an individual attribute but a value-driven process shaped by workplace well-being and cultural expectations. This perspective challenges conventional HRM models by proposing a more holistic view of competence mobilization.

Beyond theoretical insights, this study makes a methodological contribution by proposing testable hypotheses linking values, QWL, and competence, providing a foundation for future empirical research. The model encourages the use of structural equation modeling (SEM) and qualitative approaches, facilitating a deeper understanding of the mechanisms underlying workplace behavior. Furthermore, by incorporating cross-cultural and diversity dimensions, the study suggests avenues for examining how demographic and employment factors shape workers' experiences, contributing to the growing body of research on diversity, equity, and inclusion in organizations.

7. Final Reflection

The integrated theoretical and methodological research model presented here is considered strong because it brings together constructs that are usually researched separately and also allows for integrated studies with other themes. In this way, a broader and deeper understanding can return to these theoretical frameworks other insights that enhance the theories involved and the research derived from them, more clearly demarcating constructs and research methodologies, even more so focusing on specific contexts, such as those arising from or enhanced by the Covid-19 Pandemic.



It is observed as significant the points of intersection between such constructs, lacking visibility for monitoring, evaluation, and possible stabilities or changes that favor a better perception of quality of life by the worker, as well as professional competence developed and in progress, aligned with the human values in question that precede them. Therefore, the results of these researches can contribute to improvements in the policies and companies practices, in general.

Finally, it is reinforced here that research that uses a cultural aspect, highlighting how specific groups behave, allows us to find characteristics of those belonging and often opens ranges of analysis in the face of content that may be opposed to each other, as well as those to clarify similarities and behavioral changes. These are factors of great relevance, especially longitudinally, for people, organizational management and/or institutions, professionals, and a better apprehension of groups separated by their idiosyncrasies and vicissitudes.

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