

## **The Meaning of Work to State Judges Based on Self-Perception**

**Abstract:** The meaning of work is a well-known topic of research, especially in the Psychology field. However, few studies have examined the work of judges, a professional category of great social relevance which involves complex and multifaceted work. In order to fill this gap, the objective of this study is to describe aspects associated with the meaning of work of judges based on self-perception supported by the following dimensions: (a) work centrality; (b) societal norms- rights and duties, and; (c) valued work goals and outcomes. Fifteen Brazilian first degree state court judges were interviewed using a semi-structured script, between October 2015 and February 2016. Content analysis technique was used to analyse the data. The results demonstrate that even though judges present signs of frustration related to excessive workload, they identify themselves positively with the work they perform. This feeling is associated to the fact that judges perceive their work socially relevant, aiming to the improvement of society through just, efficient and impartial work. We discuss these results and a research agenda is suggested.

**Keywords:** Judicial Administration; Judge's Work, Meaning of Work.

### **1 Introduction**

Work is fundamental to society and work relationships have been going through technological and administrative transformations due to innovations and changes, which have influenced productivity, motivation and satisfaction of workers. This fact has increased the importance of researching the meaning of work, seeking on one hand to increase our understanding of this subject, and on the other to offer suggestions for improving workers' quality of life and organizational efficiency (Antunes, 2008; Morin, 2001; Tolfo & Piccinini, 2007).

There is considerable literature related to the meaning of work, especially in the areas of health and education (Bendassolli & Gondim, 2013; Schweitzer, Gonçalves, Tolfo & Silva, 2016). However, there are few studies about the meaning of work to judges. These professionals are essential to judicial administration performance, because they are responsible for the quantity, quality and productivity within their jurisdiction (Gomes & Guimaraes, 2013). Beside tasks related to procedural sentencing, judicial orders and decisions, judges also perform administrative tasks (Mazzilli & Paixao, 2002). In this sense, they may be considered judges/managers as defined by Gomes, Guimaraes and Souza (2016).

The social importance of the role of judges lies in the fact that when faced with situations of social conflict, people in general view the work of these professionals as the solution for every problem. A judge generally represents the last hope of those who have been injured and seek redress for the violation of their rights, hoping to have these rights recognized by the magistrate. Thus, the role of the judge is not solely restricted to the legal role of interpreting and applying legislation. It goes beyond this traditional vision as it seeks to meet the expectations of society, thus undertaken a social role of great relevance and complexity (Gomes et al., 2016).

From an economic perspective, judges are professionals who have utility functions as any other worker, made up of satisfaction, income, leisure, family, and self-fulfilment, among other factors. However, unlike other professions that focus on economic factors, judges consider the recognition of society to be more important than financial gains (Posner, 2004). Another perspective emphasizes the altruistic nature of judges as argued by Stout (2002), in which the real motivation of this career is more tied to collective interests than self-interest.

In the specific case of Brazil, according to the report *Justice in Numbers* published by the National Council of Justice (CNJ), the total number of pending cases in 2015 (70.8 million) is growing continually and is almost 2.5 times larger than the number of new cases (28.9 million) and the number of resolved cases (28.5 million). This implies a vicious cycle in which the number of new cases is greater than the number of resolved cases, which makes judges feel that they are performing arduous, difficult and inefficient work (CNJ, 2015).

Considering this context and seeking to fill the conceptual gap stated above, the objective of this study is to describe, based on self-perception, aspects associated with the meaning of work for judges, based on studies by Morin (1996, 2001) and on dimensions described by the MOW team (Meaning of Work International Research Team) in 1987: (a) absolute and relative work centrality; (b) societal norms- rights and duties, and; (c) valued work goals and outcomes. This study is relevant because it understands better the work of judges, understood as a central actor in judicial administration.

## **2 The Meaning of Work**

Work has two antagonistic conceptual dimensions. The first refers to something negative, which implies effort, discomfort, difficulty and sacrifice. This refers to the origin of the Latin term *tripalium* which means an instrument of torture used by ancient farmers. From this perspective, workers do not recognize work as having value in the sense of being useful to society. Thus, individuals work only for economic stimuli which make the activity susceptible to changes that come from restructuring, unemployment, underemployment,

and temporary work, among others (Albornoz, 1994; Bastos, Pinho & Costa, 1995; Coda & Falcone, 2004; Kubo, Gouvêa & Mantovani, 2013; Lourenço, Ferreira & Brito, 2013).

The second dimension relates work to dedication, performing an action with pleasure which leads to self-fulfilment. There is a feeling of gratification, because the work goes beyond financial issues and offers the individual social integration, making it possible for one to express individuality through creative ability, which in turn brings with it fulfilment and desirable social status (Bastos et al., 1995; Coda & Falcone, 2004; Kubo et al., 2013; Lourenço et al., 2013).

Considering that the choice of work does not come solely from economic factors, the studies of Morse and Weiss (1955) were pioneering in terms of the meaning of work. These authors questioned a group of subjects whether they would continue to work if they inherited a large amount of money or won the lottery, which would afford them comfort for the rest of their life. The results showed that 80% of the respondents would continue working.

Following this line of reasoning, studies undertaken by the MOW team (1987), confirmed the idea that people would not leave their work even if they could have a comfortable life without it, because they considered work to be not just a source of income, but also a way of keeping in touch with others and being part of society (Goulart, 2009; Tolfo & Piccinini, 2007; Schweitzer et al., 2016).

Hackman and Oldhan (1975) stated that a significant work encompasses three conditions. The first is a variety of tasks, with the chance to use a variety of skills. The second is that the work not be alienating and that the worker has knowledge of the entire process, from start to finish. The third is feedback about the worker's performance which permits self-evaluation. In addition to these studies, Morin (1996, 2001) defines the meaning of work as a structure made up of three components: (i) significance (sensus) – representations that the subject has of his own activity; (ii) orientation (sumo) – the inclination that the individual feels for this work and; (iii) coherence (phenomenology) – which seeks balanced and harmony work relations.

Some studies make a distinction between the terms “meaning” and “meaningfulness” of work as Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski (2010). For these authors meaningfulness is linked to socially shared cognition and interpretation of the work. Meaning, on the other hand, is associated to the understanding of the act of giving meaning to work, considering emotional and singular reasons. To Tolfo and Piccinini (2007), significance refers to the representation that the individual has about his work on individual, group and social levels. Meaning, meanwhile, besides encompassing significance, allows the evaluation of the utility of tasks, self-fulfilment, satisfaction and freedom. Considering the mediating nature of work as an activity, to distinguish meaning from significance, Bendassolli and Gondim (2013), propose a theoretical “triad” with an

additional concept. They present a psychological function which mediates and articulates the meaning and significance of work.

In the same manner, in distinguishing between significance and meaning, Morin (1996, 2001) suggests that while significance refers to a collective or social perspective, meaning is related to something more individual and personal, dealing with the aspirations of the worker regarding to what he performs. Even though a portion of the literature points out differences between meaning and significance, this study will mainly consider the term meaning based on the model developed by the MOW team (1987) for whom these two concepts are synonymous.

There are two opposing conceptions in terms of the meaning of work. The first suggests that meaning of work is built during childhood and adolescence because of the formation of the individual's personality. Thus, work experiences are of lesser importance, making the meaning of work something static and unaltered. The second one assumes that even though it is built over a person's lifetime, the meaning of work undergoes changes. These changes and experiences make the meaning of work something more dynamic with variations occurring even in terms of values (Salanova, Gracia & Peiró, 1996, Palassi & Da Silva, 2014; Goulart, 2009).

Based on the principle that the meaning of work is dynamic and influenced by the organizational and family context of the individual, involving historical, economic, political and cultural aspects, the model developed by the MOW team was the result of research undertaken in eight countries (Belgium, Britain, Germany, Israel, Japan, the Netherlands, the United States and Yugoslavia) with the aim of evaluating work centrality in the lives of people (MOW, 1987; Bendassolli & Gondim, 2013; Kubo et al., 2013).

The MOW team organized its data into three dimensions: work centrality; societal norms; goals and outcomes. The first dimension, work centrality, based on cognition and emotion would be the individual's beliefs regarding to the value of work in his life. Considering value and behavioural aspects, through a comparative analysis of work and other areas of life such as family, religion, and leisure, this concept is divided into absolute and relative centrality (MOW, 1987; Paiva, Bendassolli & Torres 2015).

The societal norms related to work refer to moral and ethical values, oriented towards rights and duties. This is the equilibrium between what individuals receive from their work situations and their contributions to society. While the orientation of rights refers to commitment of society or an organization to an individual, duties are related to the individual's contribution to society associated with personal fulfilment (MOW, 1987; Bastos et al., 1995)

The third dimension of the MOW model deals with work goals and outcomes valued by the individual. These are the functions that work means to people in terms of the

satisfaction they derive during and after it. Broadly speaking, this is the real motivation that leads the individual to work (MOW, 1987; Paiva et al., 2015).

A fourth dimension, also stated in these studies, addressed to the identification of work rules associated to the goals that work activities embody for the individual. However, because it does not possess statistical significance, this dimension was excluded from the MOW model (Tolfo & Piccinini, 2007; Goulart, 2009).

In Brazil, one of the first studies about the meaning of work using the MOW model (1987) was undertaken by Bastos et al. (1995) who studied the meaning of work of 1,013 employees of twenty different public and private organizations. In terms of work centrality compared to other spheres of life, the results showed that family was the dominant sphere for individuals, followed by work, leisure, religion and community. Among the motives associated with work, the expressive function – having interesting and self-fulfilling work, and the economic function – salaries and earnings, dominated. In terms of social norms, the results showed that work is seen more as right than duty.

A study conducted by Coda & Falcone (2004) among fifteen Brazilian executives from several organizations identified 10 categories of converging meaning with the results obtained by MOW (1987). In terms of centrality, the results demonstrated that its meaning can be summed up by the time spent at work, and the emotional factor and involvement in the tasks. In terms of social norms, there was an association of work with dignity and honesty. In this sense, even though the results demonstrate that work contributes to society, cultural-religious traditions influence its meaning to individuals. Therefore, work was considered a duty.

Looking for evidence of the meaning of work for young Brazilian executives, fifteen students at a college were interviewed by Morin, Tonelli and Pliopas (2007). The results were grouped into three dimensions. The first dimension, dealing with the individual level, highlighted the aspects associated to personal satisfaction, autonomy and survival, learning and growth, as well as identity. The second dimension, dealing with the organizational level, addressed the utility of the work performed and interpersonal relationships. The third and last dimension dealt with the societal level and considered factors related to one's place in society and contributions to society. The results stated positive meanings associated with work as expressed by the participants, who considered it of primary importance in their lives.

Kubo and Gouveia (2012) studied the meaning of work among alumni of a Brazilian university and public employees. The study concluded that the meaning of work had the following order of relevance: work centrality, valued goals and outcomes and, finally, societal norms. In detailing, valued goals, aspects such as the physical environment, salary, workload, stability, interpersonal and work relationships, and interesting work were not considered relevant. On the other hand, greater importance was given to aspects such as

autonomy, appropriate tasks, climbing the corporate ladder, variety and novelty. In terms of valued work outcomes, the search for a network and status or prestige dominated other aspects such as interesting work, keeping oneself occupied and the relationship between work and social results.

Focusing on several creative industries related to music, dance, theatre and other areas, Bendassolli and Borges Andrade (2011) studied the meaning of work of 451 employees. The results indicate that women have greater work centrality than men. There was no comparative analysis of the work sphere as compared to leisure, family or religion. Another interesting characteristic was the high level of emotional commitment on the part of workers in these environments, implying an intense dedication to one's career. The study points to associated factors such as learning, social utility, identification and expression through work, autonomy and good interpersonal relationships.

Kubo et al. (2013) studied 304 professionals from the Brazilian public and private sectors, proposing a structural model that associates work centrality, social norms, and work goals and outcomes. The results showed that women, people with graduate degrees and single people have greater work centrality. People with greater religious contact and fewer dependants have a greater sense of responsibility. The study concluded that work is fundamental to people's lives and that the goals and outcomes valued at work such as learning, autonomy, prestige and climbing the corporate ladder are more important than rights and duties.

One can perceive from the literature published in Brazil that the meaning of work has been studied in several areas, but only one work, to our knowledge so far, has studied the judiciary environment. Mazzilli and Paixão (2002) investigated the meaning of work to state judges with an emphasis on the dichotomy between pleasure and suffering, without dealing with Morin's studies (1996, 2001) and the dimensions of meaning described by the MOW team.

There are a vast number of studies outside the Brazilian background that deal with the meaning of work, but most of them address health and education scope. One example is the study undertaken by Demirkasimoglu (2015) with public school teachers in Turkey. The results indicate that teaching work presents a multidimensional view with positive and negative biases in terms of economic, social and psychological functions. The most positive bias was in terms of the economic function of work as a necessity which can provide a better life. Socially, teaching was viewed as offering a great chance to change society. The psychological function, showed that feelings of happiness and freedom elevated self-esteem. In terms of negative biases, the economic function was stressed in terms of low wages; the social function was mentioned due to the lack of free time; and psychologically, constant fatigue was cited.



In Iran, studies related to the meaning of work with people possessing serious mental illnesses came up with results that differ from most studies because family and religious aspects were more important than economic factors. The participants demonstrated a need to work to have a sense of identity, to feel equal to others and to be useful members of society, implying a feeling of dignity and social interaction. The results indicate that the workplace is the best spot to acquire new abilities, and it is a way of making up for lost time, maximizing the potential talent of these subjects (Mohammadi, Rassafiani, Haghgoo & Taherkhani, 2015).

Analysing the meaning of work with bank employees in India, Anuradha, Srinivas, Singhal and Ramnarayan (2014) found out that work had different significance at different times: before and after making the choice of profession. The results show that subjects who have many possible career choices are motivated by personal inclinations and soon work takes on a personal significance. On the other hand, when work options are limited and the individual does not have a clear idea of which career to pursue, economic factors and social interactions are what determine the meaning of work.

In Israel, workers were questioned about the meaning of work by Harpaz & Meshoulam (2010). The results showed that subjects became more individualistic as time goes by. Material issues such as salaries and benefits, career progress, status and prestige took precedence over collective social values. In terms of centrality, the family sphere was more dominant than work for Israeli workers; while in terms of valued outcomes or products these workers found salary more relevant than other work goals.

This study adopts the conception suggested by Salanova et. al., (1996) for whom, the meaning of work is something dynamic. And it is influenced by the changes and experiences that everyone has been through his life. This is supported by the reasons that lead people to work such as the search for self-fulfilment, the enhancement of skills, security and autonomy, interpersonal relationships, doing something useful for society, and keeping oneself occupied (Morin, 1996, 2001). And finally, it is based on the three dimensions of analysis laid out by the MOW (1987) studies: work centrality; societal norms; and valued work goals and outcomes.

### **3 Methodology**

The data was collected between October 2015 and February 2016 through semi-structured interviews with 15 first-degree judges at state courts of Goiás. The state judicial courts of Brazil represent 82.5% of the country's legal cases and encompass 68.7% of the judges (CNJ, 2015). The average interview lasted 18 minutes, with the shortest lasting eight minutes and the longest, 37 minutes. Of the fifteen interviewees, 11 are men and four are women. The average age of the interviewees is 48 years old and the average experience as a

magistrate, 20 years. The sample included judges from civil, criminal, environmental, family and financial benches.

After a brief explanation of the subject and the objectives of the study, we asked permission to record the interviews. The interview began with items that sought to interpret the work of the interviewee in broad terms and then the meaning of the work and how it is planned and controlled. We also sought to identify the perceptions of the interviewees in terms of: (i) the courts performance in general; (ii) self-perceptions about their own performance, and; (iii) the social impact of judicial work.

At the end of the interviews, the interviewees were invited to speak freely about other subjects concerning their work. With their permission, audio recordings were made of the interviews which were afterwards full transcribed, except for one interviewee who did not consent to have the interview recorded. In this instance, notes were taken which were edited for inclusion in the contents of the study results.

To analyse the data, we used the thematic content analysis suggested by Bardin (2009) using the following steps: (a) the data was inserted into a table with columns representing interview questions and lines the responses of each individual judge, (b) the judges were each assigned a code beginning with the letter J followed by a number, thus the sample ranged from J1 to J15, (c) free-floating reading of the responses, organizing it into themes according to the dimensions described by the MOW team (1987), and (d) treatment and interpretation of the data with immersion in the responses identifying the thematic areas by similarity and contrast analysis.

#### **4 Results and discussion**

In terms of the issues with respect to judges' work, planning routines, organization and the control of their activities, we received similar responses from the magistrates, emphasizing on juridical aspects and procedural rites. In general terms, the judges interviewed understand their work to involve judging, pacifying, and solving conflicts, seeking to guarantee the rights of those citizens who feel that their rights have been infringed. This became a springboard for mentioning other aspects of judicial activity, such as trying to improve people's lives, seeking to minimize the abuse of power on the part of the state regarding to its citizens, filling gaps in administrative orders that are taken by executive governance bodies such as regulatory agencies, the police and the penitentiary system.

Overall, the judges interviewed, despite the difficulties stated, are satisfied from the point of view of their recognition by society. These results converge with studies carried out with other professions in which the potential to change and influence society through work results improve individual satisfaction (Coda & Falcone, 2004; Morin et al., 2007; Demirkasimoglu, 2015).



Considering the time spent on work is an aspect of the **work centrality** dimension (MOW, 1987), most of those interviewed stated that they spend most of their time on work, even when they are not in the work environment. In this line one of the interviewees stated: *“it is rare to see a judge (...) go home leaving everything at the office. Generally, judges take some work home with them as well.”* Most of those interviewed take their work home with them, in detriment of the time dedicated to their family, confirming this centrality. However, even though some of the judges expressed satisfaction and a feeling of personal fulfilment with this dedication to work, other interviewed judges, expressed dissatisfaction and frustration with not being recognized: *“you bring work home, you work over the weekends, your workload is as great as ever and you hear people complaining.”*

Based on an evaluation of their work compared with other spheres of their lives such as family, religion, and leisure through the **relative centrality** construct, two of the interviewees stated that they do not take their judge persona with them outside of work: *“I seek to be a judge only at work,”* and *“(...) it is a public role that should be separate from your person.”* From the responses, we can see that most of the interviewees seek to reconcile their work with their family, without distinguishing which of these dimensions is more important in their lives.

Among the spheres of life most stressed in their answers, the judges underlined their lack of free time (leisure) and time spent with their families, which is like the findings of Bastos et al. (1995), Harpaz and Meshoulam (2010) and Demirkasimoglu (2015). The religious sphere was not stated by the interviewees, which diverges from studies in which religion was found to be more important than work (Mohammadi et al., 2015). An interesting aspect of this study is that there was no difference in terms of gender regarding to work centrality. All the male and female judges interviewed, demonstrated that work is of primary importance in their lives, which differs from other studies in which men have a greater centrality than women (Bastos et al., 1995; MOW, 1987) or vice-versa (Bendassolli & Borges Andrade, 2011; Kubo et al., 2013).

In terms of **absolute centrality**, we first must consider the unusual nature of being a judge, reconciling the individual's personality, feelings and personal traits, with the individual's personification of a public body as determined by the constitution (Mazzili & Paixao, 2002).

In absolute terms, the greater the perception of the characteristics of significant work, the more important the work is in the life of the individual (Bendassolli & Borges Andrade, 2011). In this sense, some of the interviewed judges do not see themselves off office even when they are away from work. They seek to behave discreetly and value impartiality in their judgements, avoiding interference from the environment or external life, or in the words of one of the interviewees: *“a judge is a more reserved person (...) who has to be impartial (...) and cannot get involved socially, because (...) then people will get confused and believe that this judge is being partial.”*

In terms of the **societal norms** dimension, there is no consensus among the studies in terms of guidance from work regarding to rights or duties. For example, while Bastos et

al., (1995) view work more as a right than duty, the results presented by Coda & Falcone (2004) indicate the opposite, i.e. work is more a duty than a right. The interviewees only mention the duty imposed by society for faster justice. In this sense, they affirm that their career should include rights just as much as duties, which is like the findings of Bendassolli and Borges Andrade (2011).

Within the *societal norms* dimension, *rights* are related to the commitments and responsibilities of societies and organizations in terms of individuals, or in other words, the subject has the right to learn through significant work (Morin, 2001). In this sense, in terms of education and training, the judges interviewed suggest the inclusion of content related to management in their formal education and refresher courses, so that they can dedicate themselves more to judicial issues in their everyday work, or in the words of two of these judges: *“a judge has to be a manager (...) I think in our education there should be a course related to management,”* and *“judges are not just people who pass down sentences and dispense justice; judges also need to be managers of their own activities.”*

In terms of education, another point emphasized by our interviewees, is the need for judges to be leaders, which is in line with the work of Vieira and Costa (2013). These authors describe aspects that make it difficult for judges to be leaders such as the lack of dialogue and cooperation between judges, structural difficulties and mainly a judge's lack of training on subjects regarding management and leadership. One of the interviewees put it in the following terms: *“a judge is not just the head of his unit; a judge has to be a leader.”*

In terms of *societal norms* guided by duties, Kubo and Gouveia (2012) emphasize that these are the duties of all individuals to society. One point made by the interviewees was the absence of the government in certain situations where society demands judicial action: *“everyone complains about the judiciary (...) but it is not the judiciary branch (...) it is the executive branch that is responsible for the penitentiary system (...) for the police (...) for the district attorney's office, not us.”* Another response to this question of judicial guilt notes: *“the police try to arrest criminals, but the judicial system releases them. However, citizens do not realize that judges decide according to law. If there is something that needs to be questioned urgently, it is the law.”* Another criticism of the judiciary was stated by the interviewees in terms of demands regarding to consumer judicial proceedings. This criticism must do with the negative impact on the justice system of the imbalance of power that exists between consumers and production companies and service providers. This leads to a large volume of similar suits as stressed by two of the interviewees: *“consumer rights cases are the most common and they have to have severe penalties,” “powerful players all over Brazil (...) banks, telecommunications service providers, and finance organizations (...) they count on the inability of the judiciary to cope with all these cases.”* In this sense, Barreiro & Furtado (2015) contextualize these excessive demands and define the term judicialization as a political, social and juridical phenomenon which accentuates the role of the judicial branch regarding themes that were previously handled by policy and individual issues.

The third dimension of the MOW model has two constructs. The first one refers to *goals* that are valued at work, linked to the content of tasks such as: salaries and benefits, autonomy and independence, satisfaction with interesting work, motivation, the physical environment and stability. The second construct, *outcomes*, stand out the functions

attributed to work such as: earning a living, personal fulfilment or social utility, interpersonal relations with an emphasis on status and being valued, network contacts and the ability to keep oneself occupied (MOW, 1987; Morin 2001; Coda & Falcone, 2004; Kubo & Gouveia, 2012).

In terms of the **goals** valued at work, most of the interviewees agree that they receive high salaries, but society questions their earnings as one of the respondents indicates: *“a judge’s salary is very high and citizens criticize this.”* Some of the interviewees stated that magistrates are motivated by collective interests and not just salary alone, which differs from some studies in which salary is a worker’s main objective (Bastos et al., 1995; Harpaz & Meshoulam, 2010). One of the interviewed argues: *“today people become judges (...) because they feel a calling (...) because there are other careers financially more attractive (...) [it is] almost a higher calling.”*

In terms of earning of administrative assistants, there were differences of opinion among the judges interviewed. While some of them consider the salaries paid to these employees to be good, others believe that these salaries are very low. On the other hand, there was agreement among most of the respondents regarding the lack of commitment of administrative staff. As one of the judges stated: *“I think that [one must have] a commitment to public service, independent of complaining about salary.”*

Considering career stability, which is linked to autonomy and independence within the **goals** dimension (Kubo & Gouveia, 2012), the judges interviewed stressed that they need to exercise their duties with impartiality without pressure from lawyers, interested parties, the government or their family. In this sense, in line with Posner’s findings (2004), relating to the stability of judge’s career, a portion of those interviewed believe that it is essential that they feel fulfilled and public recognition for the work they perform, and not just focus on financial gains. They justify this career choice in terms of steady income, given that they could have chosen higher income professions such as lawyer career.

In terms of the concepts of alienation and variety as they pertain to interesting work, which is part of the **goals** dimension (Morin, 2001), most of the judges stated the repetitive nature of some of their procedures, characterizing their work as uninteresting and without significance. Thus, due to the large caseload, the work becomes somewhat simplistic, as two of the interviewees summarized this feeling: *“I am a machine that gives out sentences (...) I am only afraid of the workload increasing to the point where I would not be able to keep up,”* and *“the role of the magistrate is to solve conflicts, but now in practice I feel that I simply produce sentences.”*

Also in terms of the **goals** dimension, there is the question of motivation (MOW, 1987). The judges interviewed indicate the constant need to motivate their support teams because of the high rates of turnover. As one of the interviewees states: *“The judge must motivate his assistants, because they earn little money and it is difficult to motivate them (...) judges need to create a sense of team commitment.”*

According to Kubo and Gouveia (2012) the physical environment is not a relevant objective, and workers value autonomy and a variety of tasks. Most of the judges interviewed differed with this assessment pointing to the physical environment as an aspect

of work that needs to be more highly valued. Along these lines, Mohammadi et al. (2015) emphasize the importance of a good work environment, as supported by one of the interviewees: *“you stay there practically the entire day, 60% of your life you spend at work (...) being in an inappropriate place can even make a person ill.”* Regarding technology, most of the interviewed judges stated that beyond the most extensive use of technology, such as the electronic lawsuit, many advances are still necessary to reach better standards for resolving court cases.

In terms of the **outcomes** valued at work (MOW, 1987; Bastos et al., 1995), the results of this study indicate that judges seek not just financial earnings but personal fulfilment and being useful to society, in line with the studies conducted by Posner (2004) and Gomes et al. (2016). On the other hand, even though most of those interviewed do not prioritize their wages, the interviewed judges feel embarrassed when they are criticized by citizens for their high salaries and their low productivity: *“a judge’s routine today is extremely stressful and people do not realize this and think they earn a lot and do very little.”*

About the self-fulfilment, the judges interviewed stressed their social impact as a way of being useful to society, which is in line with the altruistic nature of judges presented by Stout (2002) and confirmed by the studies of Gomes et al. (2016), where judges’ motivation is related to collective interests rather than their own personal interests. One of the judges dealt with this theme in the following manner: *“(...) I earn enough to (...) support myself (...) through my work, but [what gives me personal fulfilment] is mainly the idea of trying to improve society by providing justice.”*

The interviewees believe this profession has clear and valued goals as suggested by Morin (2001). In this sense, two judges stated the need for bringing justice closer to the community, explaining what the judicial branch does to increase the public recognition of judicial work: *“the work of the judiciary is poorly understood by the public (...) there is little marketing of the work that magistrates do and the importance of the judiciary”* and *“anything becomes the fault of the judiciary, it does not react, it does not do any marketing.”*

Analysing judicial work in terms of networks, the results are in line with some studies that value the search for personal relationships (Morin et al., 2007; Kubo & Gouveia, 2012). The interviewees highlighted the need for the public to have access to judges to offer greater accountability as two of the judges interviewed indicate: *“(...) people need to receive good service, it is no good giving orders, making decisions and rendering decisions if you are in a gilded cage,”* and *“I receive visits from everyone in my chamber (...) it is fundamental from my point of view to meet with all of the parties.”* Significant work is the one that keeps the subject occupied (Morin, 2001). Even though some of the judges interviewed feel under pressure due to excessive workload, which results in a feeling of not fulfilling one’s duties and makes them inefficient from the point of view of society: *“we work within our limits (...) our productivity is very good, it just does not match demand (...) what bothers a judge (...) is seeing the amount of work that we do, we work, work and work and (...) then it appears as if (the judge) did nothing the day before.”*

Figure 1 presents a summary of the results considering the dimensions of analysis proposed by MOW's (1987) meaning of work model:

Dimensions of Analysis		Results
Centrality	Relative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Judges spend most of their time working, even when they are away from the workplace.</li> <li>- There was no distinction between genders in terms of centrality, with both men and women considering work fundamental.</li> <li>- The family and leisure (free time) spheres of life were the most often stated, while religion was not mentioned.</li> </ul>
	Absolute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The unusual nature of being a judge, reconciling the individual's personality, feelings and traits with the personification of a public body as determined by the constitution.</li> </ul>
Social Norms	Rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Education and training: the judges emphasized the need for courses related to management and leadership.</li> </ul>
	Duties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To avoid excessive judicialization.</li> <li>- The legislative and executive branches can intervene in situations within their jurisdictions in terms of the elaboration and application of laws.</li> <li>- In terms of judicial proceedings, consumers and powerful players such as banks, telephone service providers and health plan providers</li> </ul>
Goals & Outcomes	Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Salary: considered to be above average, but this is not the main motivation for joining this career. There was disagreement in terms of the salaries of administrative assistants.</li> <li>- Autonomy and independence: importance of stability and good earnings to ensure impartial judgements.</li> <li>- Repetitive nature of some procedural rites characterizes the work as uninteresting and without significance.</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There is a need to motivate the support team, instilling a greater sense of commitment in them.</li> <li>- Physical structure and technology: there has been a significant advance, but it still is not sufficient given the amount of demand.</li> </ul>
	Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Economic incentives were not highlighted by the judges.</li> <li>- Self-fulfilment is linked to being useful to society, and there is an emphasis on the altruistic nature of judges giving priority to the collective interests of society rather than self-interest.</li> <li>- Broadening public access to judges would increase transparency.</li> <li>- Judges feel sufficiently engaged by their activities and point to excessive caseloads.</li> </ul>

Figure 1. Main research findings per dimensions of analysis.  
Source: Research results.

## 5 Conclusions and Recommendations

The objective of this study was to describe aspects associated with the meaning of work to judges based on their self-perceptions. The findings are in line with the positive perceptions found in the studies of Morin (1996, 2001) and the dimensions of meaning described by the MOW team (1987). Broadly speaking, the work of judges is viewed as an



activity that generates value, that in addition to providing a good living allow them to contribute to society, or in other words, the more positive the perception of this work, the greater significance it has for the individual (Bendassolli & Borges Andrade, 2011; Morin et al., 2007).

These results may be useful for improvements in judges' career management policies, thus reducing administrative inefficiencies of court management systems. Interviewing a larger sample of judges and extending this investigation to other studies and judicial areas could identify other important aspects related to judges' perceptions of the meaning of their work.

Because this is an exploratory study with a specific *locus*, namely the state judicial system of Brazil, the results cannot be generalized, and thus, future studies could consider judges from other states in Brazil, other areas of the judicial branch and other court levels. Other judicial system subjects, i.e. administrative assistants, lawyers, among others, could also be investigated. In the same manner, due to the scarcity of studies in relation to the meaning of work to judges in the scientific literature, future studies could analyse the perceptions of judges regarding to their work through comparative studies involving several countries.

We also suggest more studies towards the work of judges to consolidate the knowledge of this subject in Brazil. Studies could, for example, identify the perceptions of federal judges or other judicial specialties such as labour and military courts in terms of their work. In the same way, standardized scales such as the MOW questionnaire (1987) could be used to collect the perceptions of broader samples of Brazilian judges which would strengthen the generalization of these results.

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