



Article

Slow Work: The Mainstream Concept

Maria João Silvestre ^{1,*}, Sónia P. Gonçalves ¹ and Maria João Velez ²

- ¹ Centre for Administration and Public Policies (CAPP), Institute of Social and Political Sciences, Lisbon University (ISCSP-UL), Rua Almerindo Lessa, 1300-663 Lisbon, Portugal; spgoncalves@iscsp.ulisboa.pt
- ² Department of Human Resources and Organizational Behavior, University Institute of Lisbon (ISCTE-IUL), Avenida das Forças Armadas, 1649-026 Lisbon, Portugal; maria.joao.velez@iscte-iul.pt
- * Correspondence: 229718@iscsp.ulisboa.pt

Abstract: The global acceleration of the pace of life has led to an increase in working hours, time pressure, and intensification of work tasks in organisations, with consequences for the physical and psychological health of workers. This acceleration and its consequences make it especially relevant to consider the principles of the slow movement and how they can be applied to the work context, focusing on the importance of slowing down the current pace of work and its implications for the sustainability of people and organisations. The key purpose of this study is to define the concept of slow work and understand its relationship with individual and organisational factors in order to extract the structuring dimensions, enabling its empirical study and practical application. Using grounded theory methodology, we conducted 12 semi-structured interviews with leaders of organisations from different sectors. Data analysis was performed using the MAXQDA programme. It was concluded that slow work is a way of working that respects the balance between individual rhythms and the objectives of the organisation, in favour of the sustainability of both parties, and that advocates qualitative goals, thinking time, individual recovery, purpose, and the humanisation of work. The main contribution is the conceptualisation of a construct that may be used in future studies, as well as in the development of organisational policies promoting the slow work culture.

Keywords: human sustainability; slow movement; slow work; well-being



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1. Introduction

Since the Industrial Revolution, there have been major changes in the world of work, namely an acceleration in the pace of work to cope with the consumption of the contemporary world (Hawken et al. 2013; Stearns 2020). In this sense, Braverman (1974) emphasises that capitalism has led to a disqualification and degradation of work, promoting the acceleration of rhythms, which require workers to accelerate their rhythms to respond to the needs demanded and to master technicality in order to meet the demands of the capitalist market. In this scenario, the author highlights the concept of deskilling; i.e., workers' qualifications are starting to be dispensed, and the robotisation of processes takes over work by scaling it up in quantity, leaving the worker with simpler and less qualified tasks. This seems to be related to the devaluation of workers' qualified skills, with only the ability to adapt to the volatile mechanical needs of the labour market being valued, and consequently to precarious working conditions and a reduction in job guarantees for workers (Braverman 1974). The increasing demands, disappointments, frustration, and sense of injustice experienced by workers in recent decades, as well as the pressure and increased stress at work to levels considered unacceptable, have led to a reflection on how workers are living their lives, and a change in attitude towards work and life in general, with a greater concern for health and well-being (Elhefnawy 2022; Sheather and Slattery 2021).

Data from European Commission (2002) showed that more than half of the 147 million workers surveyed said they worked at a very high pace and with very short deadlines. In 2019, data from the European survey on new and emerging risks (EU-OSHA 2019)

reinforced the pressure due to time constraints, reported by 44% of participants, and long or irregular working hours by 22% of participants. Also, in the Fifth European Survey on Working Conditions (Eurofound et al. 2012), 62% of workers reported working to tight deadlines, and work intensity is shown to be related to negative health and well-being outcomes, especially occupational stress (Eurofound and EU-OSHA 2014). Data found by the Eurostat, through the *Labour Force Survey* (cited in EU-OSHA 2019), showed that more than one out of four workers reported exposure to risk factors that can adversely affect psychological well-being. Between 2007 and 2013, the prevalence increased from 25% to 28%, and exposure to time pressure or work overload was most frequently selected as the main risk factor (23.3%). These data have been corroborated by studies that present work factors, such as workload and excessive work pace, rigid working hours, unpredictable working hours or working outside normal hours, conflicting demands of work and family life, and job insecurity, as some of the factors associated with workers' psychosocial risks (Cox 1993; PPO 2020; Panigrahi 2016; Sheather and Slattery 2021). This intensification has several consequences, such as lower levels of workers' physical and psychological health, increased fatigue and stress levels, lower levels of family functioning, less effective performance at work, and the manifest desire to work fewer hours (Babbar and Aspelin 1998; Burke 2009; Sheather and Slattery 2021). In their recent study, Consiglio et al. (2023) also showed how technology has a direct effect on employees' health; more specifically, technostressors have been shown to be related to higher levels of burnout, depressive humour, and anxiety symptoms. Thus, evidence clearly shows that stress and psychological health problem costs are quite high for workers, organisations, and society (Burke 2009; EU-OSHA 2014; Hoel et al. 2001; ILO 2019). Moreover, overwork for long working hours has negative implications on the quality of life of workers and does not translate into greater productivity for organisations or better workers' performance (Babbar and Aspelin 1998; Burke 2009; Jaskiewicz and Tulenko 2012; Panigrahi 2016). Sheather and Slattery (2021) indicate that this way of working, in which workers' needs are neglected by the system, particularly at the level of leadership and organisational practices, has negative implications on well-being. And recently, we have begun to witness the phenomenon of the Great Resignation, where turnover by workers has assumed unprecedented proportions, in response to the awareness of an economically individualistic life centred on work (Elhefnawy 2022; Sull et al. 2022).

The way of working that dominates in organisations is not benefiting either people or organisations. It is clear that working rhythms are at the root of many of the problems mentioned. It therefore made sense to consider how slow movement and its assumptions could be applied to the workplace. Although slow movement is a little-studied field, there is empirical evidence that deserves to be mentioned in relation to slow living, such as greater satisfaction with life, increased well-being, reduced stress, and an improvement in people's physical and psychological health (De Bruin and Dupuis 2004; Lamb 2019). In this way, the application of these assumptions to the work context is emerging.

The aim of this study is to understand and define the concept of slow work and comprehend its relationship with individual and organisational factors in order to extract the structuring dimensions, enabling empirical study and practical application. To achieve this objective, an exploratory study was conducted, through interviews with organisational leaders with decision-making power in relation to people management, from the most diverse sectors. Slow work concepts, practices, and perceived implications for organisations were assessed. Through the identification of key concepts of slow work, it is intended that organisations may have the knowledge and resources to implement and access policies that promote a certain work culture, in this case, slow work practices, with the aim of promoting the well-being of their workers and boosting individual performance, which, consequently, will translate into a return in productivity for the organisation.

This article begins by detailing the emergence of the slow movement in a literature review. The methodology follows with a presentation of the method, sample, technique, and data analysis used to conceptualise slow work through grounded theory. The discussion

will present the slow work concept and its structuring dimensions. Finally, the conclusion presents the study's contribution to theory and practice, as well as its limitations and directions for further research.

2. Literature Review

The literature review of this study will draw on existing research on slow movement in its different contexts, considering that there has been no research conducted in the work context. Thus, the framework of slow movement will be based on the literature of the contexts where slow movement is applied and considered in terms of how it can be adapted and applied to the work context.

2.1. Emergence of the Slow Movement

In the mid-1970s, after the marks left by a century of industrial production, a group of young people from Bra, a small town in Italy, began to express their activism by defending the strong cultural commitment to the gastronomic and winegrowing legacy of the region. In November 1989, slow food became an international movement, with the presentation of the slow food manifesto, advocating ideological principles related to the progressive recovery of the quality of life, starting with improving food pleasures, and raising awareness of the damage that has been caused by fast food, trying to stop its consumption and its side effects. The social impact of the movement was so great that people began to take a broader view of the impact on people's lives and functioning, particularly in relation to production, distribution, and global consumption. In this way, *slow food* gave rise to a much broader movement, the *slow movement*. Currently we can see that the movement has extended to other contexts such as *slow university* (O'Neill 2014), *slow fashion* (Fletcher 2010; Legere and Kang 2020), *slow living* (Botta 2016; Lamb 2019; Parkins 2004; Parkins and Craig 2006), *slow cities* (Ball 2015; Fareltnik and Stanowicka 2016; Miele 2008; Pink 2008), *slow tourism* (Heitmann et al. 2011; Fullagar et al. 2012), *slow journalism* (Le Masurier 2015), *slow travel* (Dickinson et al. 2011), *slow philosophy* (Trakakis 2018), and *slow science* (Owens 2013).

2.2. Slow Submovements and Empirical Evidence

Although recent and with a lack of empirical research, the slow movement and the conceptual arguments associated with it offer a contrasting perspective to the above-mentioned problem. Slow work is therefore an antagonistic position to the above-mentioned working practices. If Honoré (2004) states that people with a slow attitude are more successful and generally function better than those who work at an arduous pace, it is legitimate to ask why the cult of overwork continues to dominate in organisations. For Nietzsche (1967, quoted in Han 2014, p. 29), human life would end in a fateful hyperactivity if it were stripped of all its contemplative side: "The lack of serenity leads our civilisation into a new barbarism. No age has ever valued active beings more, i.e., the restless. One of the corrections which it is therefore urgent to make to the character of humanity is to develop, and to a great extent, its contemplative side". In turn, Carl Honoré (2004) defines the current contemporary world as "The Age of Anger", stating that we live in an age governed by the dogma that speed is always better. The author argues that we live in a pathological relationship with time, resulting in a corrosive disconnection from what is really meaningful and pleasurable to human beings. The truth is that the breakneck pace at which we work, with tight deadlines, occupational stress, volume of work and excessive hours, leaves us very little time to live consciously and reflectively. De Bruin and Dupuis (2004) also add that the fast pace of life in contemporary Western society has implications for people's physical and mental health, which is in line with the above-mentioned data.

Slow living was first described by Parkins and Craig (2006), who defined the term as "living life more slowly", which does not mean a linear analogy to speed, but rather a lifestyle with meaning, awareness, and pleasure. According to the authors' model, the *slow lifestyle* is a way of promoting an ethical lifestyle, acting and showing admiration and generosity through attitudes and actions. This was later supported in other studies

as a conscious lifestyle, with meaning and purpose, giving primacy to the quality and pleasure of living (Ball 2015; Botta 2016; Lamb 2019; Petrini 2007). Lamb (2019), in his recent study on slow living, interviewed 18 people, from different geographical locations, who had adopted the slow living style for 2 years or more. From his analysis, Lamb identified that living a more mindful, more flexible, and less hurried pace of life brought greater life satisfaction and increased well-being for participants. The results are aligned with previous literature (e.g., De Bruin and Dupuis 2004), showing that the adoption of the slow living style reduces stress and improves physical and emotional health. Research to date has shown that adopting this lifestyle enhances life satisfaction, reduces stress, and improves physical and emotional health (De Bruin and Dupuis 2004; Lamb 2019). However, the adoption of slow living can lead to imbalances due to the current demands of workplaces, which have a negative impact on individual rhythms and work–life balance (Bowers 2007; Craig 2016; Lamb 2019). The major conflict between personal life and work life, which enhances stress, decreases health, and negatively impacts productivity, is largely related to how workers experience their work (Schulte 2019). In addition, according to Perry and Perry (2015), adopting a slow living style in mainstream society can be challenging, as society tends to prioritise economic growth and consumption, the acquisition of power, and wealth, which are key principles on which our society is based. De Bruin and Dupuis (2004) argue that we should not lose sight of the urgency for more research and policy action on ways in which both spheres of life can be improved.

It is also important to consider the application of slow movement assumptions to other contexts such as *slow fashion* (Fletcher 2010; Legere and Kang 2020) that appears, like *slow food*, as a way to impose itself in the face of the positioning that the sector has adopted in society. The fashion sector has exponentially boosted economic growth. For this production to meet market demands, the fashion sector has to meet consumers' demands, which translates into "Designed to be cheap, easy, and rapid to produce; it draws on low-cost materials and labor, short lead times, and efficient large volume production. Created to be distributed, sold, and consumed in ever-increasing quantities, it is priced low and brought to market fast" (Fletcher 2010, p. 260). In this way, the rise of consumption has led to a fashion discard culture (Legere and Kang 2020). Today's mass production has had social, ecological, and ethical effects, such as resource scarcity, exploitation of children and adults, low wages of workers in underdeveloped countries, factories with unsafe working conditions, and increased pollution. Both studies advocate the adoption of *slow fashion*, converging on the basic idea of the importance of sustainability, promoting a balance between economic, social, and ecological systems as a whole. This emphasises deceleration and inspires a more sustainable way of production and consumption. Also, Trakakis (2018) comes up with *slow philosophy*, arguing that modern life is fast and frantic and that thinking about our lives urgently needs to slow down. The author refers to reflective time and, consequently, fabulous contributions from philosophers such as Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger in defending the intrinsic adjectivation of *balance* (cf. p. 223), that is, the balance of time, the respect for rhythms, sometimes slower and sometimes faster, in the reflective capacity to philosophise.

What is implicit in all these submovements (Table 1) is the establishment of real and meaningful connections, where the assumptions that describe each slow submovement are highlighted.

Table 1. Slow submovements and their assumptions.

Slow Submovements	Assumptions
Slow Food (Petrini 2003; Van Bommel and Spicer 2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improving food pleasures; - Raising awareness of the damage caused by fast food; - Respect for the natural rhythms of food production; - Preservation of environmental degradation; - Defending fair costs from producers to end consumers.

Table 1. Cont.

Slow Submovements	Assumptions
Slow Living (Botta 2016; Lamb 2019; Parkins 2004; Parkins and Craig 2006)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Human sustainability; - Ethical lifestyle; - Living with purpose, quality, awareness, and pleasure.
Slow Cities (Ball 2015; Farelnek and Stanowicka 2016; Miele 2008; Pink 2008)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Environmental sustainability; - Infrastructure sustainability; - Promoting urban quality; - Valuing local products; - Hospitality and conviviality.
Slow Tourism (Heitmann et al. 2011; Fullagar et al. 2012)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Deeper awareness of the local people, culture, gastronomy, and music, rather than the quantity of experiences.
Slow Travel (Dickinson et al. 2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Environmental sustainability.
Slow Journalism (Le Masurier 2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rigorous and ethical journalism; - Fair working and remuneration conditions; - Quality over quantity of articles.
Slow Fashion (Fletcher 2010; Legere and Kang 2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sustainability of the environment and material resources; - Moderation in consumerism; - Producing quality rather than quantity; - Defending fair costs from producers to end consumers.
Slow University (O'Neill 2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Time for reflection and the development of critical thinking; - Teaching with quality over quantity; - Human sustainability.
Slow Science (Owens 2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Time for reflection and the development of critical thinking; - Quality scientific production over quantity.
Slow Philosophy (Trakakis 2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Time for reflection and the development of critical thinking.
Slow Thinking (Lawson et al. 2020; Sloman 1996)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Time for reflection and the development of critical thinking.

2.3. Emergence of the Slow Work Concept

The concept of *slow* implies a form of behaviour in relation to the context, be it social, family, or work. According to Petrini (cited in Honoré 2004, p. 16) “Being *slow* means that you control the rhythms of your own life. You decide how fast you have to go in any given context. If today I want to go fast, I go fast; if tomorrow I want to go slow, I go slow. What we are fighting for is the right to determine our own times”. Osbaldiston (2013) comes to support the concept by stating that *slow* is the desire to escape from the accelerated social world that globalisation has encouraged, produced, and institutionalised. Honoré (2004) argues that the slow philosophy respects our balance. We do things in a focused way, at the right, effective, and productive pace, which can sometimes be faster, and sometimes be slower. This leads to employee vitality, which is a very important component of thriving at work (Prem et al. 2017). The fast work mindset, on the other hand, has a strong connection to organisational cultures that privilege the fast pace of work, creating an organisation-wide cult of overwork. It is focused on speed, productivity, and quantity. In contrast, the slow movement tries to affirm how this vision is distorted in the face of the results to be achieved. *Slow* seeks to humanise work, arguing that the adoption of a slow mindset at work can result in greater agility of results. In this line of relationship, the literature

has shown that slow thinking or reflective thinking improves people's decision-making processes by providing a more integrated and coherent vision, in their point of view, than the decision taken at the moment (Lawson et al. 2020). In other words, slow thinking presents relative benefits in decision-making processes compared to fast thinking (Lawson et al. 2020; Sloman 1996). In addition, "individuals also differ in their temporal orientations to information processing and activity" (Bluedorn and Denhardt 1988, p. 308). In this way, the promotion of a culture of reflection will be critical in the creation of a competitive advantage in organisations.

Therefore, making the analogy of some specific sectors of work and productivity (i.e., journalism, fashion, academia) with the broader work context, slow work is expected to be based on assumptions such as carrying out tasks while respecting the limits and rhythms of each person (which on some days can be faster, and on others slower) (Fletcher 2010; Legere and Kang 2020; Van Bommel and Spicer 2011), the quantity of tasks being adjusted to working hours (and not overload tasks) (Le Masurier 2015; O'Neill 2014), having time for reflection (and not only reaction) in favour of conscious decision making, producing quality work (instead of quantity, noting that what can be seen as doing less does not mean doing worse work) (Fletcher 2010; Legere and Kang 2020; Le Masurier 2015; O'Neill 2014; Owens 2013; Van Bommel and Spicer 2011), and having respect for recovery times (e.g., lunchtime or short breaks throughout the day) (O'Neill 2014).

In turn, Lamb (2019) suggests the need for more qualitative and quantitative studies on the slow phenomenon to support the significant gaps in many different aspects of slow movement. The current study uses the assumptions of the slow movement associated with its submovements as a basis to attempt to apply them to the work context.

2.4. Similar Concepts

It is considered that the literature presents similar concepts, such as meaningful work (Lips-Wiersma et al. 2016), which corresponds to the subjective experience of work, intentional and meaningful, linked to a sense of identity, and oriented towards the growth and purpose of employees. Meaningful work also has positive implications for commitment, job satisfaction, individual job performance, life satisfaction, well-being, and general health (Allan et al. 2019; Dich et al. 2019; Kim and Beehr 2018; Tong 2018). Slow work is expected to be aligned with the purpose (Botta 2016; Lamb 2019; Parkins 2004; Parkins and Craig 2006) described in meaningful work but may bring additional dimensions.

In turn, the concept of work–life balance refers to "the individual perception that work and non-work activities are compatible and promote growth in accordance with an individual's current life priorities" (Kalliath and Brough 2008, p. 326). This seems to be in line with human sustainability (Dickinson et al. 2011; Fletcher 2010; O'Neill 2014; Parkins and Craig 2006; Petrini 2003), which is expected to emerge as a dimension of slow work.

Carmeli et al. (2015) highlight the importance of respectful engagement in facilitating relational information processing and promoting creative behaviour, both at an individual and team level. This concept highlights that interactions can be based on less instrumental and more humanising forms of interpersonal connection in organisations, and thus be an experience of mutual development through which people grow and adapt to each other, but rather a channel for the exchange of resources (Stephens et al. 2012). In this way, respectful engagement will have positive implications for fundamental cognitive processes such as creativity (Carmeli et al. 2015). This concept seems to be related to some of the assumptions of the slow movement, such as the humanising and respectful vision of each person's work individualities, and respect for the necessary individual and team time that leads to creative processes (O'Neill 2014; Owens 2013; Trakakis 2018; Petrini 2003).

Flexibility in the workplace has also been of interest to researchers and professionals as a tool to help individuals manage their work and life roles (Allen et al. 2013). In this sense, we highlight a flexible working arrangement, which refers to organisational policies and practices that allow workers to vary, at least to some extent, when and/or where they work or to diverge from traditional working hours, as an important means of balancing work

and other obligations (Lewis 2003; Rau and Hyland 2002). These policies and practices include, for example, flexible working hours, part-time or reduced working hours, career breaks, family-related leave, compressed working weeks, or teleworking. The adoption of flexible working arrangements shows a tendency to reduce pressure at work, and they are often heralded as a crucial means of balancing work and other life interests (Russell et al. 2009). This concept seems to be aligned with some key slow movement topics such as human sustainability, purpose and time management for what individuals choose to prioritise in their lives (Botta 2016; Lamb 2019; Parkins 2004; Parkins and Craig 2006).

Although the aforementioned concepts are similar to some of the assumptions of the slow movement, the aim is to conceptualise slow work and the dimensions that will integrate it. Because this has not yet been clearly defined, this study aims to contribute to the clarification of slow movement applied to the work context and to the conceptualisation of slow work, bringing out possible differences from existing concepts in the literature.

3. Methodology

This research adopts a grounded theory methodology. Grounded theory is a specific methodology developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), having been defined as the process of generating theory that begins with data, using the strategy of comparative analysis to develop new knowledge. Strauss and Corbin (1998) classify grounded theory as a qualitative method and add that this methodology uses a systematic process to construct a new theory about a particular phenomenon, following an inductive logic. Grounded theory seeks to build theory through an inductive process of data collection, in which new information is created from the data rather than testing hypotheses derived from theory (Gibbs 2008). Thus, this study follows the Interpretivist Paradigm, as it attempts to contribute to the literature with theory creation, giving rise to an output of a new theoretical concept, i.e., “slow work”.

We followed the systematisation suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998), who argue for open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. According to the authors, systematisation begins with open coding, “decomposition, analysis, comparison and categorization of the data” (Strauss and Corbin 1998, p. 61), followed by axial coding which consists of grouping the concepts into categories, culminating with selective coding from where the central category of the phenomenon under analysis emerges (Strauss and Corbin 1998). In other words, the analysis process began with open coding, with a line-by-line categorisation where participants’ reports were assigned meanings and codes. Then, we proceeded to the axial coding, establishing relationships between the categories. The systematisation process was concluded with selective coding, which gave rise to the central category, which connects all other categories.

All the interviews were videotaped and transcribed into text, in Portuguese. Data were coded and analysed with support from the MAXQDA data analysis support software. The analysis was conducted by one coder (the interviewer) and three consultants. That is, in an independent way, the external consultants analysed the open coding, axial coding, and selective coding carried out by the interviewer. In this audit process, it was found that there was coherence and convergence between the various stakeholders, so all the codings were validated by the consultant’s audit.

3.1. Participants

The group of participants (n = 12) was composed of professionals with management and leadership positions (e.g., CEOs, managers, or HR directors), from various organisations in the areas of IT, communications, intellectual property, retail and farming, banking, mobility, construction, outsourcing services, and the third sector. The final sample of participants was defined according to the achievement of theoretical saturation (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Thus, a sample of 12 participants was collected (5 males and 7 females), with an average age of 45 years (see Table 2). The participants of the present study were

recruited, from November 2021 to February 2022, through references from human resource professionals and through formal invitation to several organisations in the country.

Table 2. Characterisation of participants.

Participant	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12
Age	48	46	44	50	44	44	55	39	38	43	49	44
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Male	Male	Male	Male	Male	Female	Female	Female	Female
Role	Operations Director	Technical Director + Human Resources Director	Senior Project Manager HR Processes	Group People Director	CEO	Chief Human Resources Office	Manager/Co-founder/Chief Culture Officer (CCO)	Head of Patents	Quality & Agility Department Manager	Manager	Talent Lead	Learning & Development Director
Years of experience in leadership positions	+10 years	+20 years	+10 years	+15 years	6 years	+10 years	+30 years	5 years	8 years	7 years	7 years	+5 years
Industry in which it operates	Banking and Finance	Social sector	Food Retail and Farming	Business & facilities services	Building and Construction	Customer care & Technical support	IT	Intellectual Property	IT	IT	Telecommunications	Mobility and Parking
No. of employees in the organisation	6244 (PT) 378 (Operations Dep.)	155 (PT)	35,000 (PT) 120,000 (Global)	20,000 (PT)	77 (PT)	12,400 (PT)	230 (PT)	70 (PT)	1000 (PT)	550 (PT) 720 (Global)	1400 (PT)	800 (PT)

Considering that management positions may have greater richness for the study, given that they supervise and guide the work of many others, with inherent decision-making power to establish strategic organisational practices, in this case, slow work, it seemed relevant to consider a sample of participants composed of professionals with management and leadership positions. The intention was to collect perspectives of leaders with some experience, and therefore, a minimum number of years of experience was considered in this process of attracting participants. It was also considered relevant that the leaders belong to organisations of a medium or large dimension (minimum of 70 employees), as they involve more structured management practices. The choice of the sample also took into account professionals who valued individual and organisational well-being. In this way, the following inclusion criteria were defined: (1) working under a stable employment contract; (2) performance of leadership functions for at least 5 years; (3) integrating functions in organisations with more than 70 employees; (4) valuing individual and organizational well-being.

3.2. Method

We conducted semi-structured interviews allowing the collection of data from organisational leaders. All participants were interviewed online, through Zoom. The interviews were recorded, after the informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity of the answers were presented, as well as detailed information about the purpose of the study, the inclusion criteria, the role of participants and the role of researchers, and the interview guide. The duration of each interview was approximately 1 h. The interview guide included the following three main topics on the analysis of the slow work concept: (1) slow work phenomenon (e.g., “What are the characteristics of a slow work way of working?”); (2) slow work antecedents (e.g., “How would you characterise the culture of a slow work practising organisation? What would be the main values and principles?”); (3) consequences of slow work (“What are the implications of slow work on employees?”) (Table 3).

Table 3. Interview guide.

Main Topics	General Purpose	Questions
Slow Work Phenomenon	Identify and understand slow work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What do you think slow work is? How does slow work translate into practice? - What are the characteristics of a slow work way of working? Examples. - If you could characterise the best way of working in one of two antagonistic poles (fast vs. slow), which would it be? Why? - Do you think it is pertinent to have recovery times in slow work? Why do you think so? - Which examples of recovery do you consider important to be implemented?
Slow Work Antecedents	Identify and understand the organisational and individual resources and vulnerabilities that influence slow work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How would you characterise the culture of a slow work practising organisation? What would be the main values and principles? - Which organizational practices can promote slow work? - Which are the attitudes, behaviors, and individual characteristics that can contribute to adopt a slow work style?
Consequences of Slow Work	Identify and understand the implications of slow work for the organisation and employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the implications of slow work on employees? - What are the implications of slow work on the organisation?

3.3. Data Analysis

Data analysis occurred simultaneously with data collection. After the analysis of the first interviews, there was a need to make minor adjustments to the interview guide. It was noticed that participants repeated ideas in two questions, so there was a need to group the two questions into one (“How does slow work translate into practice?” and “What are the characteristics of a slow work way of working?”). It was decided to eliminate one of the initial questions from the interview guide as it did not prove relevant to the aim of the study “If you could characterise the best way of working in one of two antagonistic poles (fast vs. slow), which would it be? Why?”. It was also perceived that the question “Do you consider relevant the existence of recovery times in slow work? Why?”, was more related to the group of questions about the phenomenon itself than to the group of questions about the antecedents, where it had initially been asked.

It is considered that these changes in the interview guide are in accordance with the process of the methodology used/initially chosen, the grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967).

4. Results

The aim of this study is to understand and define the concept of slow work, in order to extract its structuring dimensions, enabling its empirical study and practical application.

The analysis was considered in three categories, according to the structure of the interview guide. Some subcategories were closely related to the questions of the categories, and others became evident with the analysis of the interviews.

Using the MAXQDA qualitative data analysis programme, the analysis process began with open coding, with a line-by-line categorisation in which meaning and codes were assigned to the participants’ interviews. Axial coding was then carried out, establishing relationships between the categories (Table 4). It was verified that the antecedents category (identify and understand the organisational and individual resources and vulnerabilities that influence slow work) encompasses the following subcategories: organisational culture (values and principles), organisational practices, and individual characteristics. The

consequences category (identify and understand the implications of slow work for the organisation and employees) comprises the following subcategories: implications for people, and implications for the organisation. The phenomenon category (identify and understand slow work) encompasses the subcategories: respect for rhythms and limits, humanisation, recovery, thinking time, quality, purpose and antithesis.

Table 4. Axial coding (categories and subcategories).

Categories	Subcategories
Antecedents	Organisational culture (values and principles) Organisational practices Individual characteristics
Consequences	Implications for people Implications for the organisations
Phenomenon	Respect for rhythms and limits Humanisation Recovery Thinking time Quality Purpose Antithesis

With regards to the antecedents category, it was possible to verify the emergence of three subcategories: organisational culture (values and principles), organisational practices, and individual characteristics (Table 5).

Table 5. Antecedents summary.

Subcategory	Systematisation (Open Coding)	Participant Reports—Examples	Analysis: Systematisation
Organisational culture (values and principles)	Aspects of the values and principles that are valued in an organisational culture that follows slow work were noted	“It has to be a culture focused on people, on people well-being” (P7) “Respecting individuality and the rhythms that each person will have to develop their work” (P9) “The humanisation of work. Individualisation in the sense of realising that each person is unique . . . humanisation without doubt, and that alone is already immense” (P10) “It has to be an innovative company, it has to have the character of innovation and be disruptive in the face of what happens, have the courage to say that you work differently here” (P12)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - organisational culture focused on well-being - flexibility and respect for different work rhythms - values of excellence, with a strong orientation towards quality - humanistic organisations - character of innovation and courage, by being disruptive in the way they work

Table 5. Cont.

Subcategory	Systematisation (Open Coding)	Participant Reports—Examples	Analysis: Systematisation
Organisational practices	Aspects of organisational practices that are aligned with slow work were noted	<p>“In slow work it is much more important to focus on work goals than on the number of hours worked” (P7)</p> <p>“An important practice is downtime to have reflection times on work. Reflection times can make all the difference in teams” (P2)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - work by objectives, not by compliance with working hours - existence of moments for breaks - blocks of time for reflection - investment in the personal and social development of employees
Individual characteristics	Aspects of the individual characteristics best suited for slow work were noted	<p>“It takes a process of self-awareness for people to know when they work best, or when they are in need of rest. They need to have that self-awareness” (P9)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - self-awareness - people who value quality of life and personal well-being - younger generations

4.1. Organisational Culture (Values and Principles)

In the emergence of the subcategory organisational culture (values and principles), it is considered that it may represent resources or vulnerabilities that influence slow work, and therefore, it is placed in the antecedents category. Aspects of the values and principles that are valued in an organisational culture that adopts slow work were analysed. It was possible to conclude the following description:

Slow work was associated with an organisational culture focused on people’s well-being, this being its most important value. *“It has to be a culture focused on people, on people’s well-being”* (P7).

Slow work also presents a strong alignment with respect and flexibility values, in the sense of respecting the different work rhythms of each person, considering that not everyone works in the same way, and not everyone has the same work rhythm. *“Respecting individuality and the rhythms that each person will have to develop their work”* (P9). However, this respect should be mutual, in order to have a balance with the organisation’s needs. *“Flexibility—being flexible leaders, and realising that just as we have setbacks in life, so do others; Respect—having respect for people and their rhythms, but this respect has to be mutual, people also have to respect the needs of the organisation; and, promoting Responsibility—treating others as adults, and expecting them to reciprocate, because people behave as we are treating them”* (P4).

A slow work culture should be aligned with values of excellence, goals successfully achieved, *“Values of excellence, of effective achievement of objectives, of successfully reached goals”* (P2), with a strong orientation towards quality, *“An organisation adopting slow work should have a concern for people’s well-being, and a strong quality orientation”* (P11), and sustainability of results *“I think it is essential to be a results-oriented company, making sure that the application of slow work gets results”* (P12).

The slow work culture was also characterised as organisations that are humanistic, *“The humanisation of work. Individualisation in the sense of realising that each person is unique . . . humanisation without doubt, and that alone is already immense”* (P10), and that have the character of innovation and courage, *“the incentive of organisations has been money, and it needs to shift to purpose. There needs to be an intention shift”* (P10), by being disruptive in their way of working: *“It has to be an innovative company, it has to have the character of innovation and be disruptive in the face of what happens, have the courage to say that you work differently here”* (P12).

4.2. Organisational Practices

In the emergence of the subcategory organisational practices, inserted in the antecedents category, aspects of organisational practices that are aligned with slow work were analysed. It was possible to conclude the following description:

Slow work advocates working by defined objectives rather than by compliance with rigid working hours. *“In slow work it is much more important to focus on work objectives than on the number of hours worked”* (P7). Flexible working hours respect the individual rhythms of each worker. *“Flexibility of hours, respecting the rhythms of each person, whenever possible. Work by objectives and not by number of hours”* (P12).

Another practice reported was the existence and compliance with break times, *“Having well-being breaks”* (P3), i.e., the existence of recovery times, either long breaks or daily recovery times, *“moments of pause that make us create energy to continue”* (P2).

In slow work, people are expected to have blocks of time for reflection, to focus on developing goals. *“An important practice is downtime to have reflection times on work. Reflection times can make all the difference in teams”* (P2).

Emphasis is placed on investment in the personal and social development of employees, in favour of greater individual and organisational well-being, *“betting on people’s personal and emotional growth. The organisational practices promoting slow work had to be an emotional growth of the workers, much more than the technical growth (. . .) The development of soft skills is an essential practice to promote slow work. In fact, I think there is no slow work without a personal development, it is not possible”* (P10).

4.3. Individual Characteristics

In the emergence of the subcategory individual characteristics, inserted in the antecedents category, aspects of the individual characteristics that best suit slow work were analysed. It was possible to conclude the following description:

The individual characteristic most associated with slow work was self-awareness, *“This concept of slow work, to be developed, to be worked on, needs people’s self-awareness (. . .) Self-awareness is key. Self-care, taking care of myself, people taking care of themselves can also seem to me to be a key feature”* (P12), i.e., the ability to understand what our body needs, the awareness that there are different dimensions of life that must be taken care of, namely the healthy rhythms and practices that we must preserve in our work sphere. *“It takes a process of self-awareness for people to know when they work best, or when they are in need of rest. They need to have that self-awareness”* (P9).

People more likely to adopt this form of slow work were described as people who value quality of life, *“People who value quality of life, and life outside work”* (P8), a more conscious, purposeful, meaningful concept of life, people focused on their own well-being, people of greater introspection, people who value reflection, and who value life outside of work, *“people who value reflection, and people focused on their own well-being. People who want more than just work, people who don’t put work as the first priority in life”* (P2).

Although it has been mentioned that this way of working will be well accepted by most people, *“I think all people would like slow work”* (P10), there is a tendency for the younger generations to join in more easily, as a generation that attributes a higher value to well-being, flexibility, and the balance between personal and professional life: *“the younger generations will find it much easier to join in, it’s a generational trend”* (P12).

Regarding the consequences category, it was possible to verify the emergence of two subcategories: implications for people and implications for organisations (Table 6).

Table 6. Consequences summary.

Subcategory	Systematisation (Open Coding)	Participant Reports—Examples	Analysis: Systematisation
Implications for people	Aspects of the consequences of slow work for workers were noted	<p>“This way of working will always enhance well-being” (P9)</p> <p>“The slow way of working surely has positive implications on performance, and quality.” (P1)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - well-being - individual work performance - quality of life
Implications for the organisation	Aspects of the consequences of slow work for organisations were noted	<p>“Productivity will be affected in a positive way.” (P1)</p> <p>“It results in a higher quality of work.” (P4)</p> <p>“If the workers are happier and more aware of what they do, the organisation is also more lean, more productive, and is also more sustainable” (P3)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - productivity - service quality - competence - creativity and innovation

4.4. Implications for People

In the emergence of the subcategory implications for people, included in the category consequences, aspects of the consequences of slow work for workers were analysed. It was possible to conclude the following description:

Slow work can have positive implications for people’s well-being, “*This way of working will always enhance well-being*” (P9), and health (physical health, psychological health), “*it will naturally reduce stress*” (P4); “*the implications of slow work would be improvements in health and well-being*” (P7).

As well as positive implications for individual worker performance, “*The slow work way of working certainly has positive implications for performance, and quality*” (P1); “*In slow work people are freer to be more creative, they are under less stress. When we are more creative and more productive, not in the sense of doing more, but in the sense of doing things better, or having more disruptive and more agile ideas that simplify work, the more results we can get*” (P9).

And there are positive implications for quality of life. “*By respecting everyone’s rhythm I can only see positive benefits. A person who works when they are most productive ends up working less, and can manage their stress levels better, and can have a better work-life balance*” (P9).

4.5. Implications for Organisations

In the emergence of the subcategory implications for organisations, inserted in the category consequences, aspects of the consequences of slow work in organisations were analysed. It was possible to conclude the following description:

The practice of slow work in organisations should bring positive implications for productivity, “*Productivity will be affected in a positive way*” (P1), “*positive impact on the organisation’s productivity*” (P10), “*reflecting more, doing more calmly, doing more quietly, leads to increased productivity of organisations*” (P3), “*Over the years we have increased our productivity, which leads us to conclude that, slow work, which is what we promote, increases productivity*” (P7); positive implications for service quality, better competence, more creativity, and more innovation (disruptive ideas), “*In slow work people are freer to be more creative, are under less stress. When we are more creative and more productive, not in the sense of doing more, but in the sense of doing things better, or having more disruptive and more agile ideas that simplify work, the more results we can get*” (P9); and positive implications for outcomes, i.e., more sustainable results, “*If workers are happier and more aware of what they do, the organisation is also more Lean, more productive, and is also more sustainable*” (P3), which can be achieved less quickly but with higher quality, “*we wouldn’t find the results as quickly, but maybe the results would be more sustainable . . . do it less quickly and make sure the result is more sustainable*” (P3).

In relation to the phenomenon category, it was possible to verify the emergence of seven subcategories, which stood out through the participants' reports as being an integral part of the slow work phenomenon: antithesis, balance/respect for rhythms and limits, humanisation, recovery, thinking time, quality, and purpose (Table 7).

Table 7. Phenomenon summary.

Subcategory	Systematisation (Open Coding)	Participant Reports—Examples	Analysis: Systematisation
Respect for rhythms and limits	Aspects of respecting the workers' individual rhythms and the healthy balance between a worker and his/her work tasks were noted	"A balance between what the organisation needs and what the person can give" (P3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - balance between individual rhythms and the organisations objectives - respect for the natural rhythms of the human being
Humanisation	Aspects of respecting the human side of the worker were noted	"workers want respect, they want flexibility, and they want fair value for their work." (P10)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - human sustainability - paying a fair price for labour
Recovery	Aspects of workers' needs to stop, rest, and recover were noted	"Recovery times are important for the slow work, but the type of recovery time needed will vary from individual to individual." (P6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - existence of recovery times - balance: individual needs with function requirements
Thinking time	Aspects of the importance of reflecting and taking time to focus on the work goals were noted	"The quality of work, the results of our work would have much to gain from this calm and reflection, from doing things with thinking" (P2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - time blocks for reflection and focus - quality, innovation, and creativity
Quality	Aspects of what is important to achieve in organisational goals and results were noted (quality vs. quantity)	"Always prioritize quality over quantity, because I believe that qualitative goals are more sustainable and lasting than quantitative ones." (P3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - strong quality orientation - more sustainable and lasting goals
Purpose	Aspects of motivations and what gives meaning to the work were noted	"It's respecting the interests and motivations of the workers, promoting this interaction and connection between people, which is so salutary. The focus is no longer on productivity and what has to be done, so we have space for creativity, which can then result in productivity." (P11)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - motivated and fulfilled workers
Antithesis	Aspects of what slow work is not were noted	"I compare being too busy a lot to consumerism, we seem to want to have more, and do more, and being too busy time is almost like a flag to show that we have value." (P9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - intense work rhythm - high pressure with deadlines and schedules - automatic and reactive people as machines - multitasking (blocking creative processes) - non-humanisation of work

4.6. Antithesis

In the emergence of the subcategory antithesis, aspects of what slow work is not were analysed. It was possible to conclude the following description:

Currently, most companies work in a way that is antagonistic to slow work, which was reported as an unbridled pace of work, with acceleration, "*People are going around the wheel, with a lot of acceleration, which is highly damaging . . . , it causes people a lot of stress and it has no sustainability*" (P7), with many moments of pressure with deadlines and schedules, and which never allows one to disconnect from work, "*Nowadays we are exposed to high turnover, in an extended time schedule, and in permanent stress*" (P6).

This is an automatic way of working, focusing on emergencies, and working in reactive mode, focusing on solving immediate problems, "*we're always on automatic, we're always*

in emergencies, we're always solving immediate problems" (P2), always in a race against time, which leads to many mistakes in work tasks that would be minimised if time was spent on them "as we are always doing everything against the clock, we work much more in fast mode, and end up making many mistakes that could be minimised if we were calmly doing things" (P2). In other words, it is working in automatic mode, under pressure, with an overload of timetables and deadlines, in which there are no moments of calm, of revision, to avoid mistakes; "if people are too busy doing it wrong, they will keep doing it wrong all the time because they don't have time to think about how to do it better" (P4). It is a fast-paced way of working that does not allow time to reflect and think about the best way to do tasks, compromising the quality of those tasks. "The fast takes away competence and credibility from us" (P2).

People are working like machines, blocked from creative processes, critical thinking, and problem-solving, subject to permanent multitasking, *"you are expected not to make mistakes, but if you make mistakes you are human, there is a dissociation here of human characteristics with what humans are expected to do as if they were machines" (P10), which compromises organisational results, and sustainability. "People are spinning their wheels, with great acceleration, which is highly detrimental to companies. The excessive focus on results is not positive for companies, that is, we forget that the result appears if we do things well, but if we only focus on results, it causes a great deal of stress in people and has no sustainability" (P7).*

Time is taken up by things of no interest, leaving no time for what is fundamental. *"Things of no interest occupy our time. We no longer have time for what is fundamental. They are busy agendas of empty things" (P2). This results in poor time management and makes periods of work highly unproductive; "the overfull schedules that don't allow us time to reflect on anything, and getting quality work done" (P12).*

This acceleration is associated with a loss of purpose at work: *"Although there is the vision and mission of the organisation, people still do not know why they are doing a certain task on a day-to-day basis" (P10); "I want to slow things down, otherwise I don't realise that they're going by and they're happening, and I'm not choosing them. I wasn't doing things with purpose, they were just happening, and so fast that I can't even get a sense of what's going on" (P10).*

This antagonistic way of working was reported as an unnatural process, which does not respect biological and individual rhythms, which does not respect humanisation at work, and which does not bring any benefit to people, *"This is inhuman, we are exploiting people like we are exploiting anything else, like we are exploiting natural resources, like we are exploiting animals, children. We are facing the dehumanisation of work. It is the lack of thinking that we are a community, of working collaboratively" (P10), translating into an increase in health problems such as stress, anxiety, or burnout. "We are more prone to a number of clinical pathologies than we were in the past. Our pace is a totally different pace from our past and our grandparents. And associated with that comes the rest. People find it difficult to sleep, to rest, to switch off" (P1).*

This way of working is also seen as enhancing a decrease in competence and credibility. *"The fast takes away competence and credibility from us" (P2). However, workers believe that they have to do everything that is asked of them within unrealistic deadlines, going against their biological rhythms; otherwise, their competence will be called into question. "We always think we have to do everything, because if we don't do it our competence will be questioned" (P2).*

4.7. Balance/Respect Rhythms and Limits

In the emergence of the subcategory balance/respect for rhythms and limits, aspects on what is respect for the workers' individual rhythms and the healthy balance between a worker and his/her work tasks were analysed. It was possible to conclude the following description:

Slow work is the balance between individual rhythms and the objectives of the organisation, *"A balance between what the organisation needs and what the person can give" (P3), in other words, the respect for the potentialities, individualities, and work rhythms of each worker and for the objectives that the organisation has to meet, "It is a balance between the*

tasks of the organisation and the rhythms of the person themselves. The respect of these two rhythms, of the needs (of the organisation) and of what people can give." (P1), in favour of its productivity and sustainability: "Thinking about the balance of the other movements, it makes sense that it's a balance between the needs, between the individual rhythms and the goals of the organisation, there being a match, a balance. We are respecting what the organisation needs and also people's rhythms." (P6).

It is the respect for individual rhythms, "everyone doing things at their own pace. It's the respect for the individual rhythm of work" (P4), with regard to flexibility of schedules in which each worker can be more productive, in which they can have a better individual performance: "slow work can be interpreted as respecting our individual times and rhythms, in order to manage their moments of productivity . . . it is important that people have the freedom to manage their moments of productivity, when they are most productive, when they want to be working, as long as it does not interfere with the team dynamics" (P9).

It is the respect for the natural rhythm of the human being, "If on one day we need to go faster, we go faster, if on another day we can go slower, we go slower. Because we know how to use those triggers in ourselves to get them done. It's that consistency that slow work can bring." (P3), in a logic of sustainability and quality of life, "to work taking into account the natural rhythm of the human being, in a logic of sustainability, in a logic of maintaining life in quality" (P12).

4.8. Humanisation

In the emergence of the subcategory humanisation, aspects of the respect for the human side of the worker were analysed. It was possible to conclude the following description:

Humanisation at work advocates care and respect for people. It respects the individuality and the rhythms that each person has to develop their work. "I would say it's respecting the individuality of each person. Respecting the individuality and the rhythms that each person will have to develop their work." (P9). And it defends the payment of a fair value for the worker: "workers want respect, want flexibility, and want a fair value for their work" (P10).

Humanisation at work translates the sustainability of human beings, "slow work would be about bringing humanity back to work. Because I think it used to exist when we were at the right pace." (P10), respecting their natural biological needs, as well as their needs as social beings. It is a way of working that promotes quality of life, and a balance between personal and professional life. "Slow work is a concept that translates this work that allows the sustainability of human beings in quality, in balance, and respecting their natural needs. It is very important to maintain humanity at work. As this has a biological perspective of balance, hormonal, physiological, of the functioning of our brain and body. But it also has a social and cultural component. . . our needs for interpersonal relationships" (P12).

Humanising work also means accepting a natural process of creativity and reflection and tolerating error: "the natural process would be to make mistakes, learn and do better next time. Humanise the work. Here the letting go wrong, is to let the natural process of coming up with new ideas and conclusions flow, let it flow" (P10).

4.9. Recovery

In the emergence of the subcategory recovery, aspects of workers' needs to stop, rest and recover were analysed. It was possible to conclude the following description:

Slow work defends recovery times, "I think the existence of recovery times in slow work is pertinent." (P3); i.e., this way of working considers that work tasks induce stress which interferes with our performance, and, therefore, it is fundamental to recover energy levels, highly potential for the productivity of the following task. It is fundamental that people have recovery times, and that there is respect for the recovery times of others. "Recovery times are important in slow work, and these recovery times must be in balance with the needs of the worker and the demands of their job. And even in times of pressure and greater stress, the balance and the existence of recovery times is fundamental. We have to alternate times of pressure, with times of greater relaxation, of greater balance. Daily recovery is fundamental" (P5).

Considering the individuality and assumptions of slow work, it makes sense that recovery times should be adjusted to individual needs, *“Recovery times are necessary and fundamental, but the type of recovery time depends on each individual and the circumstances. We have to respect these individual recovery cycles. The break has to exist, where you switch off completely. Whether it is daily, several times a day, depends on each person. It’s important, and each one should understand what is their appropriate time.”* (P4), in order to return to a pre-stress level and resume tasks with more physical and cognitive energy, giving greater ability to perform them more effectively. *“These break patterns should prevent reaching the limit. Our personal curve has performance peaks, and this requires breaks, and for that people must have the awareness to understand how and when they need it. In order to define our recovery patterns there has to be a great deal of self-knowledge”* (P10).

Each individual should be self-aware of their needs to slow down and stop. *“I think the existence of breaks is fundamental, but more important than their existence is the awareness of how each one should use them. They should exist, but each of us should know how to recognise the type of recovery we need”* (P3). Recovery or recovery times must be in balance with the needs of the worker and the demands of the job. *“Recovery times are important for the slow work, but the type of recovery time needed will vary from individual to individual”* (P6).

4.10. Thinking Time

In the emergence of the subcategory thinking time, aspects of the importance of reflecting and dedicating time to focus on the objectives of the work were analysed. It was possible to conclude the following description:

Slow work argues that it is important to stop and think in a much more reflective, much more thoughtful way of working. *“In slow work the pauses for reflection are a fundamental aspect”* (P7). It is about allowing people time to focus on their goals, time to think, time to reflect, time to ponder, time to study, to research, to read, to acquire new knowledge, to exchange ideas, time to anticipate and plan. *“People need to stop their tasks, to reflect and think about how that task can be optimised, streamlined or robotised”* (P6).

It is working with a focus on objectives, in the interests of improving the quality of work.

These premises allow creativity to flourish, enhancing innovation, optimisation, task agility, and the development of new skills. *“The quality of work, the results of our work would gain a lot from that calm and reflection, from doing things thinking”* (P2); *“allowed people to have time to study, because innovation comes from new training and new knowledge, but above all give people time to think, work on doing different, and succeed in doing different”* (P4).

4.11. Quality

In the emergence of the subcategory quality, aspects of what is important to achieve in the organisational objectives and results (quality vs. quantity) were analysed.

The following description has been considered with regard to the above subcategory:

Slow work has been described as having a strong quality orientation. It favours quality over quantity, *“In slow work, clearly quality is more important than quantity”* (P7), believing that qualitative objectives are more sustainable and lasting than quantitative ones. It is based on a more qualitative perspective, always considering a basis for the survival of the company: *“slow work can be implemented in accordance with what can be defined if the focus is not exclusively on quantitative growth or turnover, but rather considering other indicators, in a more qualitative perspective, always considering a basis for the company’s survival”* (P8).

4.12. Purpose

In the emergence of the subcategory purpose, aspects of the motivations and what gives meaning to work were analysed. The following description was considered in relation to the above-mentioned subcategory:

Slow work is based on purpose, that is, the worker is aligned with a work with which he/she identifies, feels he/she is part of something, feels that what he/she does

brings more added value, knows and understands the usefulness of what he/she is doing, feels motivated and fulfilled. *“It’s respecting workers’ interests and motivations, promoting this interaction and connection between people, which is so salutary. The focus is no longer on productivity and what has to be done, so that we have room for creativity, which can then result in productivity”* (P11).

4.13. Development of Theory for Slow Work

In summary, and according to the analysis of the above-mentioned subcategories, the analysis of the excerpts reported by the participants (coded segments), and the qualitative analysis performed through the MAXQDA programme, it was possible to conclude the following description for the category of the phenomenon (slow work):

Slow work is the balance between individual rhythms and the objectives of the organisation; in other words, it is the respect for the potentialities, individualities, and work rhythms of each worker, and for the objectives that the organisation has to meet, in favour of its productivity and sustainability.

It is a way of working that highlights the humanisation of work; that is, it advocates care and respect for people. It respects the individuality and the rhythms that each person needs to develop their work. Humanisation at work translates to the sustainability of human beings, respecting their biological needs, as well as their needs as social beings. It is a way of working that promotes quality of life and a balance between personal and professional life.

Humanising work also means accepting a natural process of creativity and reflection, tolerating error, and the defence of fair remuneration for the worker.

Slow work defends *recovery* times; i.e., this way of working considers that work tasks induce stress which interferes with our performance, and, therefore, it is fundamental to recover energy levels, highly potential for the productivity of the following task. It is fundamental that people have recovery times, and that there is respect for the recovery times of others. Considering the individuality and assumptions of slow work, it makes sense that recovery times are adjusted to individual needs, in order to return to a pre-stress level, and to resume tasks with another physical and cognitive energy, giving a greater capacity to perform them more efficiently. Each individual should be self-aware of their need to slow down and stop.

Recovery times must be in balance with the needs of the worker and the demands of the job.

Slow work argues that it is important to stop and think in a much more reflective, much more thoughtful way of working. It means allowing people time to focus on objectives, time to think, time to reflect, time to ponder, time to study, to research, to read, to acquire new knowledge, to exchange ideas, time to anticipate and plan. It is working with a focus on objectives, for the sake of improving the quality of work. These premises allow creativity to flourish, enhancing innovation, optimisation, task agility, and the development of new skills. Slow work has been described as having a strong quality orientation. It favours quality over quantity, believing that qualitative objectives are more sustainable and lasting than quantitative ones. It is based on a more qualitative perspective, always considering a basis for the survival of the company.

Slow work is based on purpose, that is, the worker is aligned with a work with which he/she identifies, feels he/she is part of something, feels that what he/she does brings more added value, knows and understands the usefulness of what he/she is doing, and feels motivated and fulfilled.

Through selective coding, it can be seen that the categories (and subcategories) gave rise to the central category, according to Figure 1 below.

Proceeding to the theoretical integration, it is concluded that slow work is a way of working that respects the balance between individual rhythms and the objectives of the organisation, in favour of the sustainability of both parties, and that advocates qualitative goals, thinking time, individual recovery, purpose, and the humanisation of work.

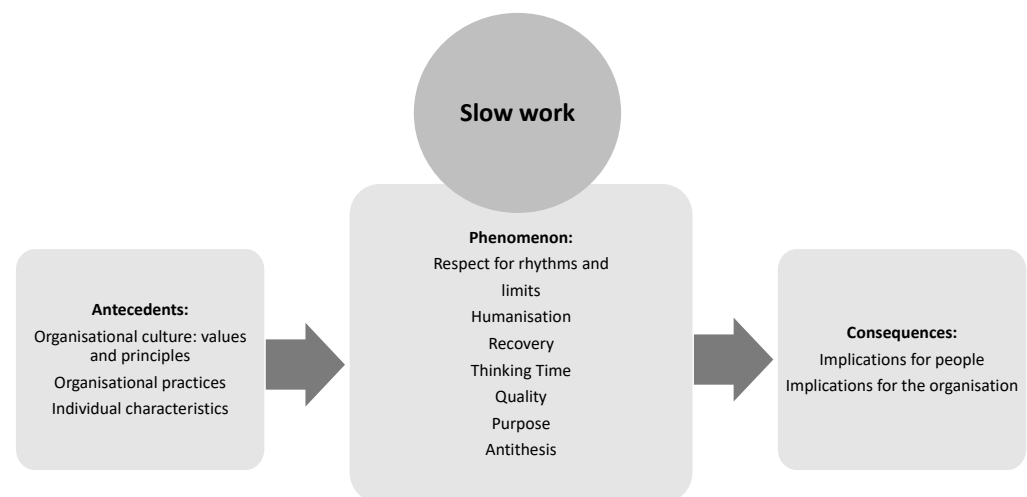


Figure 1. Systematisation process using selective coding.

5. Discussion

With the analysis of the interviews, it was possible to conclude that slow work has characteristics that correspond to those suggested by previous studies (Fletcher 2010; Honoré 2004; Legere and Kang 2020; Osbaldiston 2013; Petrini 2003; Trakakis 2018; Van Bommel and Spicer 2011), namely the respect for natural rhythms, in favour of sustainability. In fact, the unprecedented acceleration of work rhythms (Hawken et al. 2013; Stearns 2020) and its negative impact on employees' quality of life, health, and well-being (Burke 2009; De Bruin and Dupuis 2004; Panigrahi 2016) have led to voluntary turnover (Elhefnawy 2022; Sheather and Slattery 2021; Sull et al. 2022). Thus, the need to slow down rhythms is an important contribution of the slow work concept to the theory, in line with the recent study developed by Sull et al. (2022), which proposes that working in a slow environment, that respects natural rhythms, might be a predictor of employee retention (Sull et al. 2022).

The humanisation described in the slow movement comes to counter the nefarious way in which many workers have to correspond with their organisations (PPO 2020; Panigrahi 2016; Sheather and Slattery 2021), since this movement aims to promote the human side, individuality, respect for people, and a fair payment to the worker (Botta 2016; Le Masurier 2015; Petrini 2007). The recovery described is aligned with what is advocated by the slow submovements (O'Neill 2014) and supports the need for breaks throughout workers' tasks in order to return to a pre-stress level, naturally induced by work tasks, so that they can return to them performing them more efficiently (Demerouti et al. 2012; Ludden and Meekhof 2016; Sonnentag and Natter 2004), counteracting excessive rhythms detrimental to individual health and performance (Burke 2009; Jaskiewicz and Tulenko 2012; Peters et al. 1984). There is evidence that a high level of workload (in number of hours worked and pressure) disrupts the ability to recover and affects well-being and, consequently, health (Rau and Triemer 2004; Sonnentag and Bayer 2005). In this sense, Sonnentag and Natter (2004) conclude that the effort required may cause *stress* reactions in the individual, which may compromise both well-being and *performance-related* aspects, thus making recovery a necessary condition for the individual's protection.

The purpose described in slow work is also related to motivation, fulfilment, and the feeling that something of value is being done, in line with the already existing submovements of slow work (Botta 2016; Lamb 2019; Petrini 2007). In turn, related to purpose, it is stated by Schulte (2019) that the way workers experience their work has implications in terms of stress, health, and productivity. Lips-Wiersma et al. (2016) state that meaningful work corresponds to the subjective experience of work, which is intentional and meaningful, linked to a sense of identity, and oriented towards workers' growth and purpose. The literature adds that meaningful work has positive implications in terms of commitment, job satisfaction, and individual job performance, life satisfaction, well-being, and overall health (physical and

mental) (Allan et al. 2019; Dich et al. 2019; Kim and Beehr 2018; Tong 2018), namely lower levels of stress and burnout (Allan et al. 2019; Lease et al. 2019). Thus, the relevance of this construct's assumption is evidenced, as are the positive implications that it can have.

In turn, regarding the quality described in slow work, it is argued that more important than the quantity achieved is the quality and sustainability of the results, which is in line with the assumptions of the *slow movement* presented in the literature (Fletcher 2010; O'Neill 2014; Owens 2013). Accordingly, it is presented in the literature that although it may take longer to perform quality work (Kelly and McGrath 1985), it has greater sustainability, rigour, impact, and perfectionism (Feist 1997). Spending more time to ensure quality also promotes creativity, critical thinking, more thoughtful and robust decision-making processes, and minimised errors (Lawson et al. 2020; Kahneman 2011; Sloman 1996). This is related to the next assumption of thinking time, with scientific evidence that reflective thinking, compared to reactive thinking, improves people's decision-making processes by providing a more integrated and coherent view, in their view, than the decision made at the moment (Lawson et al. 2020; Sloman 1996). Therefore, the promotion of a culture of reflection will be critical in creating a competitive advantage in organisations. In this way, thinking time, advocated in slow work, is in agreement with the assumption advocated in other studies on the *slow movement*, which highlight the assumption of the advantage of reflection and pondering in favour of creativity, innovation, quality, critical thinking, and decision-making (Lawson et al. 2020; O'Neill 2014; Sloman 1996).

Practical Implications

First and foremost, this study allowed for a clear definition of the slow work concept, enabling future empirical studies to assess its relevance and application. Still, from this exploratory approach, it also became possible to advance some potentially useful action strategies for organisations wishing to adopt practices aligned with the slow work culture.

It refers to the adoption of policies promoting the well-being of workers, namely the promotion of a balance between individual rhythms and the needs of the organisation, in favour of the productivity and sustainability of both. These practices may be related to flexible working hours, respecting the times when each worker can be more productive, when they can have a better individual performance. Working towards objectives, and not by compliance with working hours, also favours respect for individual rhythms and flexibility, giving the worker the responsibility to comply with the organisation's objectives in the time and schedule that is most favourable to him/her, avoiding many moments of unproductivity and presenteeism, recurrent for those who work in the rigidity of fixed working hours.

The promotion of a humanist culture is reinforced, which sees workers as people and not as machines, who cannot cope and do not achieve everything in unrealistic and inhuman times. Therefore, the adoption of greater flexibility to fulfil tasks, within realistic timeframes and schedules that respect the worker as a human being, in a logic of sustainability and quality of life, is a recommended practice. A culture of humanisation enhances quality of life, the balance between personal and professional life, and the sustainability of the human being, not neglecting the importance of paying a fair value to the worker for his/her work, not in a logic of survival, but of recognition.

It is recommended that organisations adopt a more qualitative perspective towards the achievement of organisational objectives, always considering a basis for the survival of the company. Practices such as defining blocks of time for reflection seem relevant, allowing the adoption of a more reflective way of working, to the detriment of reactive work. Privileging, for example, the creation of work spaces or rooms with the purpose of reflection, keeping only planned meetings with a defined purpose, work plan, and time, eliminating unproductive meetings, as well as multitasking, may be practices to be considered in favour of time to ponder, reflect, study, investigate, read, acquire new knowledge and skills, exchange ideas, anticipate and plan, and allow creativity to flourish, because only in this way is it possible to enhance innovation, optimisation, and task agility and bring added value. Human beings are endowed with unique abilities such as critical

thinking and creativity, but if people are put to work like machines, we will block these valuable human processes, compromising decision making, organisational results, and even the sustainability of the organisation.

In order to promote recovery and boost individual workers' performance, the adoption of practices such as well-being breaks, in which workers are free to take breaks adjusted to their needs, is a strategy to be considered. An example might be to take a 15 min break and go for a short walk around the office block. These breaks should be considered in relation to individual needs and job responsibilities.

Investing in more constant and effective communication and feedback methods, such as one-to-one meetings with the direct leadership, so that there is a true alignment with the mission, vision, values, and organisational goals, can be a strategy to consider in order to promote the purpose of the workers.

Also, investment in the personal and social development of the workers, for the development of soft skills, presents an important role here. The promotion of self-awareness, making workers aware that there are dimensions of our lives that cannot be neglected and have to be taken care of (e.g., healthy practices in our work rhythms; hygiene of sleep; healthy eating; health promotion and disease prevention), as these individual practices sustain the well-being of the worker, and consequently his/her performance at work, which translates into value for the organisation.

In summary, the suggestion is that, above all, practices that respect people and promote well-being should be adopted, as this will naturally bring positive implications for individual performance and added value to the organisation.

6. Conclusions

The aim of this study is to understand and define the concept of slow work, understanding its relationship with individual and organisational factors, in order to extract its structuring dimensions, enabling its empirical study and practical application.

It is considered that the fact that the participants' interviews were conducted exclusively online, due to the social restrictions of the pandemic context, can be seen as a limitation for this study, in the sense that there was some rigidity of time, for some of the participants, in fulfilling the meeting slots, a fact that may have influenced a lesser reflection and deepening of the theme. Still regarding the sample, it is considered that the inclusion of participants who value individual and organisational well-being may have biased the representation of slow work. The lack of empirical research in the area of the slow movement was also a limitation considered in this research, in the sense that it was difficult to support the basis of the research, but on the other hand, it makes research in this area relevant.

The application of slow movement assumptions to the work context reinforces the innovative nature of this study, which aims to contribute to the conceptualisation of a construct that may be used in future studies. This construct contradicts the acceleration of modern times and has significant implications in terms of health, well-being, and individual performance. The aim is to raise awareness in organisations so that they rethink some of their working practices and promote organisational policies that promote a slow work culture. In summary, the adoption of recovery practices, promoting breaks that are so beneficial for individual performance; a slowing down of excessive work rhythms, with overloaded tasks, in favour of a greater focus on tasks, promoting reflection, creativity, and innovation; promotion of working hours that respect our biological balance, which converges with the humanisation of work and results in human and organisational sustainability; and also the promotion of individual purpose, through good work experiences, motivating and valuing workers, considering that purpose at work has a clear relationship with personal and organisational gains, are practices that seem to be an important strategy for organisations to adopt, enhancing the well-being of workers, their individual performance, and return on productivity, which will certainly be a competitive advantage in organisations.

In the future, the development and measurement of an evaluation tool that allows assessing slow work practices in organisations based on the domains of the construct

described in this study are relevant. This development is important to understand whether organisational practices are aligned with the defined construct. It will also be important to determine the real implications that the slow work culture may bring to employees' well-being and their individual performance, since the literature support guides us along this path. With growing technological advances, it is also important to understand how artificial intelligence technologies, such as ChatGPT or Metaverse, can have implications for slow work by supporting some tasks, leaving us more time for reflection, focus, and creativity, or, on the other hand, can be considered as a technostressor.

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