Meaningful Work as a Product of Consumption and the Consequences for Individuals who Buy it: Evidences from a Developing Economy

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ABSTRACT

There is an increasingly interest by organizations on how the most powerful experiences of meaningfulness at work can arise on individuals, and sources or mechanisms for meaning of work to be surgically managed. This study provides a new view on the subject as it has identified meaningful work sold as a product of consumption and the consequences for individuals who bought it. The findings propose a model of subjective and objective transformative reward cycles derived from buying the product of meaning, blurring boundaries of meaning of work and meaning in life, bringing extremely positive consequences of social transformation for all individuals interviewed, covering existing social voids, therewith, and providing individual growth opportunities. Simultaneous to the positive effects observed, this study also unveils a work of exploration within the individuals in challenging situation considered vulnerable, making manipulative behavior a condition which is learned and required to grow and succeed within this scheme of business model. These practices raise questions on the ethical boundaries of meaningfulness and on the practice of selling meaning at a price for performance intentions. The empirical research was performed in a developing economic context, focused on a period of financial, moral and political crisis in Brazil.
Key Words: Meaning of Work. Meaningfulness. Transformation.

1 INTRODUCTION

The following study was born based on a phenomenon of interest and assumptions of mismanagement of meaning practiced by organizations working with individuals belonging to low social economic levels in Brazil. The interest goes as far as understanding how in practice meaningfulness is projected and experienced by these individuals, and which social voids work may be replacing in these situations. For the purpose of this study, we`ve investigated the reality of distributors in a multilevel marketing company, a model also called network marketing which differs from traditional organizations essentially in two aspects: the fact that employees are not legally attached to the company, acting independently, and the mandatory 'membership package' they must buy to start on the job. On one side, the so called 'charismatic capitalism' (Biggart, 1989) has developed greatly over past years in contrast with the moment of unstable and insufficient economic development of a country like Brazil, combined with political and moral crisis perduring for at least the last decade, and, on the other side, a 'social disintegration' made explicit by these individuals investing to join as distributors and seeking to replace a vacuum of essential emotional needs and a lack of basic social values with life transformation and its rewards belonging to this model.

Organizations able to provide meaning of work have shown a capacity to generate high engagement, improve individual's self-esteem, motivation and generate a complete positive employee experience, consequently better performance for people and the businesses (Michaelson et al., 2014; Pratt and Ashforth, 2003; Rosso et al., 2010; Bailey et al., 2016). The type and amount of meaning individuals find in work is capable of shaping their behavior at work extending until impacting their lives (Michaelson et al., 2014, Rosso et al., 2010), and therefore its sources and mechanisms became fundamentally a 'mine map' for employers. The possible sources of meaning of work and its mechanisms, how they arise and persists are the areas triggering more studies in literature and still an open field (Bailey et al., 2016).

Even though the context of meaning of work sparks broadly more positive reactions (Lips-Wiersma, 2009; Weeks and Schaffert, 2019), the fact that it can be used as tool for controlling mindset change and people's behavior besides influencing so deeply the way work

is performed and experienced by individuals has ignited many investigations (Bailey et al., 2016; 2018b) on the mismanagement of meaning, misuse of tools and mechanisms able to generate meaning. The often 'wrong' or unethical use of managing meanings (Willmott, 1993) has been most commonly researched as organizational practices rather than evaluating the consequences for the individuals involved.

Given the above-mentioned conceptual background and empirical insights, the question driving this study is: **How meaning of work is being experienced as the end product?**

The main objective of this research is to demonstrate how meaning of work is being experienced as the end product by individuals and its consequences.

As specific objectives, precisely, identify new sources and mechanisms for individuals to experience work as meaningful, and how, in fact, it is experienced by employees; exploit new sources of meaning of work in an emerging socioeconomic context and unfavored social level in Brazil, its consequences and impact in their work and lives; analyze the subjective and objective rewarding cycles happening with individuals experiencing and buying meaning of work as the end product.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Definitions of Meaning and Meaningfulness

Meaning can be constructed individually – from a person's own perceptions or socially (Pratt and Ashforth, 2003) and involves a range that goes from general beliefs, values, and attitudes about work to the personal experience and significance of work (Rosso et al., 2010; MOW International Research Team, 1987). Meaning is the output of having made sense of something, or what it signifies in their context of life. Perceptions about meaning are ultimately determined by each individual (Rosso et al., 2010; Pratt and Ashforth (2003)) and can differ amongst individuals given external context. Meaningfulness, according to Pratt and Ashforth, (2003), refers to the amount of significance something holds for an individual, and this amount can highly vary provided the single experiences and background the individuals lives. A same situation can be experienced meaningful to someone and not relevant to another person (Rosso et al., 2010). For this study, the definitions used are the meaning as when referring to WHAT work signifies (the type of meaning), and meaningfulness to the AMOUNT of significance attached to the work, as per Rosso et al., 2010 definitions.

2.2 The Sources and Mechanisms of Meaning

While the literature of meaning of work allows several different angles of analysis, one characteristic is possible to be identified across most of the studies in this area: the main discussion and objectives of researchers have been around the identification of sources for meaning and its related mechanisms, exploiting important and continuous questions such as where meaning of work comes from, how a sense of meaningfulness arises and persists (Bailey et al., 2018a), understanding the real drivers capable to ignite meaning and how a work becomes meaningful for an individual. These can be of great use for organizations which pursue endlessly the desire of providing a meaningful experience and meaningfulness to employees, at the same time that employees seek continuously for a meaningful work or an experience of meaningfulness, or a life in meaning (Rosso et al., 2010).

2.3 Management & Mismanagement of Meaning

Literature shows an open dialogue related to the management of meaning, its possibilities and consequences. Some authors believe meaning is innate and not possible to be managed, and from the moment it gets managed or controlled, it stops to be meaningful (Michaelson et al., 2014). In this view, employees are not passive recipients of employer strategies to manage meaningfulness, instead, they are attentive to level of authenticity of organizational efforts to bring on meaningful experiences (Lips-Wiersma, 2009). Other studies assign a certain responsibility for finding meaningfulness to the employees themselves, provided that individuals have a choice in their work, so they likewise have an ethical obligation to pursue work that is meaningful, if individuals should pursue meaningful work or what moral obligation organizations might have to provide it (Michaelson et al., 2014).

A large current on literature argue that experienced meaningfulness is a state of mind which organizations are entitled to actively create (May et al., 2004; Pratt and Ashforth, 2003) given that meaningful work is not fully within the control of the individual, as the assignment of work and the conditions under which work is assigned influence if work can be experienced as meaningful (Michaelson, 2011). Thus, from a business management perspective, there is space for management of meanings given that there is a significant role for the employer in the process of generating meaningful experiences to employees (Bailey et al., 2016).

The management of meaning becomes a smooth process when there is alignment between employees and organization, and begins with appealing to elements of identification and individual's identity (Michaelson, 2011). This would create an environment where employees are more likely to find their work meaningful, provided that this sense of what is held to be meaningful by the organization aligns with what they personally find to be meaningful (Bailey et al., 2016). On the contrary, when there is no alignment on beliefs and values between companies and employees, the actions trying to manage meaning are perceived and seem unreal, not authentic, and can be called mismanagement of meanings (Bailey et al., 2016), misuse of the mechanisms able to generate meaningful experiences in organizations. It is conceptualized as possible negative directions which the management of meanings can take, a 'dark side' of meaningful work (Bailey et al., 2016), which can be invoked to rationalize manipulative and even unethical behaviors (Michaelson et al., 2014) and it has consequences for individuals. It characterizes how far companies are overdoing their strategies to penetrate meaning and manage employees' perception of their work as meaningful (Bailey et al., 2016), and use it as a means of enhancing motivation, performance and commitment (May et al., 2004) in order to directly influence business results. The literature exposing practices of mismanagement of meanings also brings to light how companies' strong values are made use as social control mechanisms (Pratt, 2000). It's possible to identify studies that involve the practices of organizations which made bad use of tools for meaning while only a few studies evaluate the direct consequences on individuals.

3 METHOD

It was chosen to initiate fieldwork without any a priori theoretical lens in order to allow the research concerns and questions to emerge from the field. This exploratory study uses a qualitative method and was initiated using techniques of grounded theory and that allowed the emerging empirical insights to guide the researcher and to finetune the data collection instruments, as well as to inform the choices regarding theoretical lens used and therefore the ensuing findings and contributions. According to Strauss and Corbin (1997), the core of grounded theory consists in constant interaction of induction, deduction and verification: induction relates to the work of deriving concepts from data collection, deduction which relates

to the ability of building propositions and relations between the existing concepts and data collected, and verification which relates to the process of validating the data collected in light of a new or complementary theoretical model. From the start, the researcher codes, collects and analyzes data, interacting with other theories to explain and unveils a complementary or new theory. Although we conducted this study employing a grounded theory approach, our initial findings did not generate a new theory, but rather an extension of the concept of meaning of work, mostly related to extending the comprehension of sources and mechanism generating meaningfulness at work and the understanding of how meaningful work is in practice experienced by employees and relevant consequences for these individuals.

3.1 Data Collection

This thesis draws upon data collected from two empirical sources: 1) interviews with distributors of Sunrise[1], and 2) observations and material collected upon participation in 4 different sessions of Sunrise's sales meetings, where distributors and new invitees gather once a week to revise plans, recognize the ones moving to upper level of the hierarchy, or to onboard new comers and provide trainings to them.

The empirical material collected through in-depth one-on-one interviews consists of 26 people working at the moment for Sunrise exclusively, or as a parallel activity for extra income, while having a separate fixed job; or still who had left the Sunrise team and moved on to a different job. 13 were women and 13 were men. 18 interviews were presential and 8 were conducted online. The interviews happened inside the franchise stores or in a few cases in the interviewees' houses, which was a relevant experience and further observations were made possible. The period when data collection happened was from December 20th 2019 until May10[th] 2020 in São Paulo city (largest city of the country with approximately 12 million inhabitants) and different cities of São Paulo state, in Brazil and other states such as Ceará and Minas Gerais. All interviews, except one - or which we didn't get the permission to record, were recorded with a voice recorder app and transcribed verbatim in MS Word documents. In appendix A, a table shows all details about the interviews.

As an additional strategy to cross evaluate how distributors live their experiences in practice, it was chosen to participate sporadically in sales meetings. Observations, recordings and pictures registered the experience and will help us to cross verify information obtained through the interviews.

The company selected for this study is herewith called by the pseudonym of Sunrise, producing mainly cosmetics and perfumery, focus on products for social class C&D in Brazil. By the year 2019, Sunrise declares to have an impressive growth of 80% every year since 2014, estimated to have 1million people selling / distributing their products around the country and many physical stores penetrated nationwide, being ranked in global ranking of Direct Selling News 2019 globally, which combines the top 100 direct selling companies in the world.

3.2 Data Analysis

In the five first fieldwork engagements, the researcher employed a semi-structured interview script consisting of very open questions. After these open and exploratory engagements, the researcher analyzed the empirical material and met her thesis supervisor with the objective of discussing initial insights, findings and experiences from the field.

After rounds of discussions, the concept of 'meaning of work' emerged, an ongoing open coding process has been employed, with some codes confirmed, others changed and increased importance, others changed due to the evolving insights generated from additional data collections, analysis, readings and discussions between the fieldworker and her supervisor.

The coding process was refined and finalized after 26 interviews, and generated the codes defined in the session of research findings under the subjective and social transformative cycles and material rewards deriving from it, as per below:

Table 1 - Research coding process

1st round of codes	2nd round of codes	3rd round of codes	
Inspiration / Role model	Triggering entrepreneurship	Transformative cycles:	From precarity to entrepreneur
Rejection / Belonging	Transforming values		From family to team
Recognition	Enhancing social steem		Substitution / capital of meaning
Responsibility	Providing Professional structure	Material rewards:	Translation / License to explore
Transformation/capabilities	Improving basic skills		Initializing / capacitation

Source: Elaborated by the author.

The empirical material led to a range of findings which consistently endorsed the idea of meaning of work being produced and consumed.

4 FINDINGS

4.1 Meaning of work as product

The most noticeable of the findings continuously observed throughout all empirical material is the fact that none of the respondents mention spontaneously the products they sell, their respective quality or portfolio (of more than 400 products). The products clearly occupy a secondary role in the business model and on importance for respondents. The centrality is all involving team building: recruiting new comers into the scheme, convincing them to invest money and become entrepreneurs, joining a constantly increasing sales force, under the motto of helping others. These observations were found consistent across all touchpoints with the company and led to a conclusion that the concrete products, not herewith in centrality, are therefore swapping positions with the meaning, and providing meaning to employees at work has becomes effectively the product. The existence of physical product is mandatory to endorse the multilevel marketing as legal business model differing from a pyramid scheme. The assumptions lead to a model where the main product sold is the meaning it provides, initiated as providing meaning to their work and extends to providing meaning for life. *"Everything I was looking for I found at Sunrise"* (says R.). A chance to be recognized or become visible *"it's the recognition for what she has been through. She didn't even wanted to sell, wanted a recognition for all what she has been through... it was so important"* (J.), reframe lives, changing self-conceptions *"One can see and recognize the positive change, is for better. The person improves the way they dress, behave, even the tone of voice changes"* (says J.) and establishing new beings, all this is lived intensively through finding a work of meaning. Not the products. Not a product experience. Provided that most of these entrepreneurs are coming from challenging backgrounds and emerging contexts *"he used to live in the suburbs now he lives in*

downtown, an evolution. The business model is very good because is merit-based. And simple to do it (says J.E.)" - this becomes an unique opportunity in life, which they claim not to have ever had, and that`s when this company comes in scene, and opened arms without any judgments. *"the point of difference, you study and earn money at the same time. I can`t see any negatives in this system, it is so magic"* (says B.A).

The important thing to mention is that: to become a distributor or entrepreneur of Sunrise company it`s necessary to pay, a relatively high price compared to the average income of these individuals before joining (twice the salary, in average). So the product is indeed sold with several payment conditions and after efforts of those who invest to find the money somehow. The fact that an effective payment is the "buy in" into the system, makes evident that effectively the product sold in this model by these distributors to other new comers is nothing else than meaning.

4.2 Transformative cycles

In this session we describe the subjective life changes observed which derive from consuming meaning as a product, and experiencing a work and life they consider meaningful. They are described according to the following processual model drawn in fugure 1 and explained by the following sub-topics:

1. **Transformation of perceived subjectivity:** subjective life changes deriving from consuming meaning as a product, and experiencing a work which is considered meaningful. From Precarity to Entrepreneurship; from Family to Team;
2. These transformative cycles have generated a series of objective **material and symbolic rewards** described through the following topics: a) Substitution/ Replacement b) Translation c) Initializing / Capabilities.

Figure 1 –Processual Model of the Product "Meaning of Work"
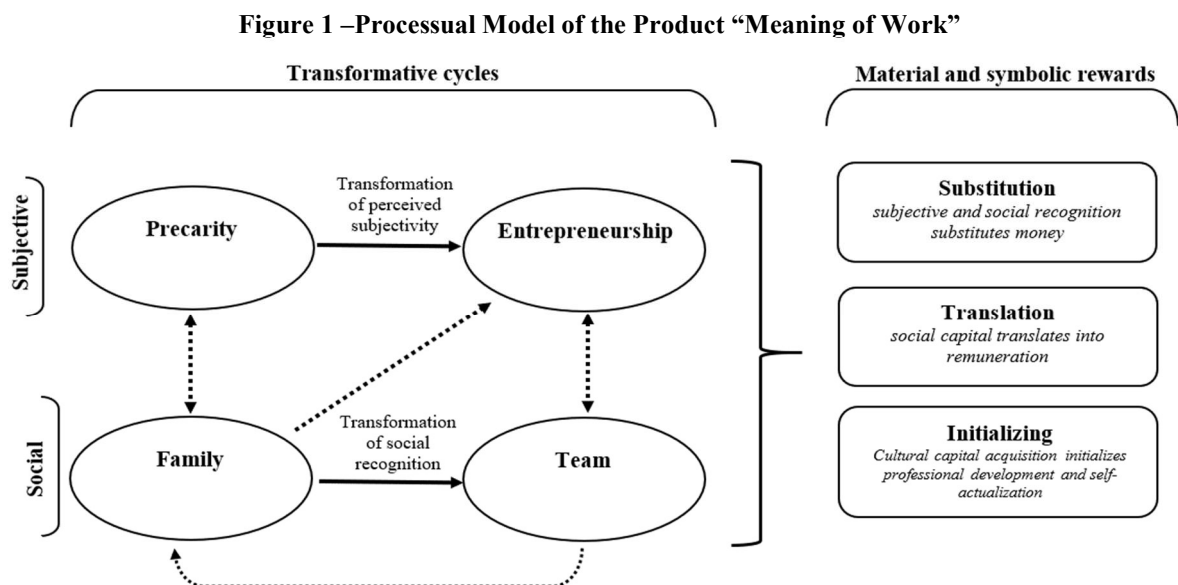
Source: Elaborated by the author and co-author.

1) Transformation of perceived subjectivity

It was possible to clearly identify, for the majority of individuals interviewed, that having encountered meaning in their work has had direct consequences for a concrete life transformation and improvements on their private lives - *"It was life changing. I had everything to go wrong"* (says Pe.), *"I feel I'm a much better human being than I was before"* (says M.).

The financial aspect, which led them to be convinced and accept to buy into the system, it`s not the reason which keeps them there for more years, moving the centrality from the extra money to complement house income to self-development. *"when we've started it was indeed for the money. But you start to see and live, so your opinion starts to change, it stops to be only money, starts to be the growth, self-development"* (says J.). *"My first time at Sunrise was for making extra money, but after I saw that this is not only the extra income…this company offers what you want. Everyone can have what they've dreamed of. One can dream and achieve, working hard, but you do. Everyone does"* (says V.).

Besides the eventual possibility to pay debts and realize dreams, there is a kind of social and emotional support which is found in this work and embrace these individuals *"It's not only to earn money, or a better life. But for the family I've built. Because here we are a Family, one helps the other"* (says C.), *"Sunrise treats each one as a human being. People outside barely understand this"* (J. E.), which explicitly show a lack of basic values and directions, that are supposedly learned via family support, elementary studies or a constructive life environment *"This was the problem with my family. They used to say I needed to go to college, and that I would be no one in life"* (says M.), *"today I'm another person because it has changed my mindset, my way of thinking. Today I consider I've had education, all learnings, financial education, personal and behavior learning"* (says B.A.).

Every and each interview describes challenging experiences throughout life and work, and how opportunities were not shining for them as they haven't managed to match what is meant to be a 'traditional success model': a person who studies, goes to university, gets a job, builds a family, buys or builds a house. The linearity hasn't ever worked given the difficult socioeconomical level, deconstructed family relationships and social harms - *"In my head, I had to study, go to college, get a job and last in there. We grow listening to that. So by that time, I didn't have the mentality of an entrepreneur"* (P.). Some have completed studies until post-graduation, others haven't studied at all. Many carry traumas of difficulties in their life path. And the fact that they all have an opportunity to work and become capable to equally reach success levels is a point of retention and drives high level of meaningfulness. *"We see here many testimonials of people who have overcome a very tough life situation. And there is every kind of person here, from street sweeper to engineer, doctor… it's the same opportunity for all, and this is fantastic, very good. This motivates us enormously"* (T.). They all claim to have found a work which supports their growth – *"I'm a lot more confident because of Sunrise. I have a very high professional self-esteem, I know that if I go to an interview at any company I'll get to perform in this environment now"* (says M.) – a work that gives possibilities they haven't ever had before, recognizes them, train them, and in comparison, claim that no other traditional job would give. The feeling of inclusion and acceptance is identified as a source to directly generate an experience of meaning of work.

The rewarding cycle identified happening with all interviewed distributors is very similar: an important financial 'moment of truth' happens which led them to look for other options for income generation (difficulty to pay debts, an own business which went broken, family challenges, depression in previous job, discomfort with familiar situation of precarity). Finally, the company or precisely the sponsor attracts this person exploiting a moment of weakness as they need emotional and financial support. The conditions to join are facilitate by the sponsor, such as paying conditions, and everything is done for the new comers, so the scheme can proliferate. A real transformation for this individual is in course, and the process they relate has so much emotional involvement which can be describes as salvation *"and this other guy said he was praying and asking God for sunrise, so he came here today"* (G.), *"I had never worked with nothing similar. Sunrise was the first multilevel company I've met. So it opened totally my eyes"* (B.). We've encountered individuals experiencing high level of

meaning based on a real perception of being saved and projection into a new reality - which they have bought into.

2) Material and symbolic rewards

a) Substitution: the reward of replacement

It was possible to observe the importance of financial aspects when joining the company and the feelings involving the financial reasons that brought them to Sunrise. However, financial reasons only guide them to listen and be open to a new opportunity, and is not the product they finally buy into. Through analyzing the subjective changes experienced, it was possible to affirm that the consumption of meaning in this context is composed also by a sort of symbolic compensation to fill in some voids of previous life context, and visibility is one of them. Examples are described with details such as a person working in the stock room of a shopping mall shoes store reports low recognition or visibility – *"I was stockist, in a shoes store in the shopping mall. I used to earn R$ 900,00. I've asked to be fired as I was 2 months alone in the stock. It is a lot to do alone. They didn't want to raise my salary, didn't want to put anyone"* (P.), and in the same way a cooker tells the story of a life in kitchens and having found a feeling of being able to do more, now she has reached 64 years old *"I'm retired, and before I was a cooker. I've worked 15 years cooking for a doctor's family. A lifetime. But I was tired. So you see the difference, where I am now" (*C.). The need to find meaningfulness sometimes approaches very simple attitudes which unveils a contrast with the social environment lived before, such as the possibility to tell their own story, be appreciated by what they have conquered and having support to their growth as individuals: *"The transformation in his life was total. He is learning. This week, for example, there is going to be a live every day. A guy who was shy and has never been to college, wasn't doing anything but work. He had never travelled, life transformation"* (J. E.). The company suddenly becomes the hero as it replaces many of these lacks of basic empowerment or visibility, and reinforced by education *"Now I'm becoming an expert. Here is a school, an university"* (C.).

And that's the perfect ground for exploration of one's ignorance and vulnerability once their feeling of being weak and in need of help is supported by a company which teaches a new direction, provide opportunities, provide new sources of meaning. And all for a price, which is, at the point, a challenge for them to invest.

The main finding in this session is the existence of what we are here calling 'capital of meaning' which replaces the monetary rewards and financial capital, with an amount of significance to what is acquired by the purchase, which surpasses the financial rewards alone – which, by the way, not always come. In this study, we have here identified the existence of a broader concept of capital attributed to meaning and acquired through work, through buying into a job and a life transformation which comes along to replace a challenging life situation.

b) Translation / License to explore

From the moment of recruitment into Sunrise, it's said they will become their own bosses and will become an entrepreneur. This is highly attractive to individuals who were submitting to any traditional job before where they barely felt visible. In the process of acquisition of so many new skills and a new reality being built, there is a projection into the condition and possibility of building a team, develop people, and being the example to many others. When listening to the individuals who have managed to escalate the hierarchical ladder and did manage to earn money, improving their income on about 10 times compared to previous situation on average, we observe a standard behavior in all cases: they have learned how to best sell the product of meaning. *"But after sometime, I understood the business was depending only on me, and that people were…. how can I say? People were a resource"* (L.)", *"you don't gain*

only for having a network, you gain for helping more people. That's how you earn more" (R.). They have reached a level of teams underneath their command from 4.000 to 10.000 people registered as distributors. These diamond level heads described their techniques to recruit by showing themselves as examples of success, offering the best of meaning to one`s life, a product of transformation and social rescue, and all under the purpose of helping other people "*When I saw at Sunrise the opportunity to not only earn money but also help others to develop, I was very happy. Because I was one that needed this development"* (M.) to restructure their finances and personal lives, so the model can perdure. "*And the interest is on helping people to build results. What I've always admired in the business was this: your results come from the moment people in your team start to get their results. As such, the more people manage their targets, more you will also have results. I find the project very interesting.*" (A. C.). They sell meaning of work, people buying into become strongly confident under their sponsor and start to lead and recruit further, so for each level of recruitments, up to the 9th level, the head still earns a percentage. This would be the ideal cycle which has happened to these ones interviewed. Herewith, we call this evolution chain based on other people`s exploration as license to explore, as the company allows e prepare people to become successful and earn money by becoming good sellers of the product of meaning, which means, to be able to explore others in situation of vulnerability, debts, or explore weaknesses of those who invest, struggling to find ways to invest the little amount of money they have and frequently are not able to reach the wished level of income or the dreams they`ve expected. "*I don't earn over people, I earn over the products they consume and they sell to generate points, and points make money. So to make this point very clear. In the 5th month I've started to actually generate work*" (Pe.).

The critical finding in this session relates to the fact that, via acquiring responsibilities and having a large team of people to manage, the individuals start to learn how to be a boss and act 'bossy', reproducing behaviors they had previously abominated. Additionally, they escalate hierarchy exactly by learning how to exploit other's vulnerability, as the network expansion kind of work is essentially it: understand and exploit the situation of other individuals in need of any financial support and take advantage of it.

c) Initializing / Building Capabilities

One of the most impacting consequences observed consistently across all interviews was related to the capability's individuals are able to acquired during their time working for Sunrise company. *"...and, really, what myself and 'Ld', my wife, we've acquired here was self-development. Not even the money. The money is a consequence. But the development and the trainings we have, sometimes not even an university can provide, you got it?"* (Pe.) They attribute the improvements to all trainings they are exposed to and the learning sessions with other co-workers and sponsor. Through observation, they also acquire capabilities in regular sales meetings and exchange with the network.

The radical changes seen in the development of members are impressive and directly related to the ability of learn, and replaces studies they could have developed in regular education system, or with stable family situation, which makes even more evident the vacuum of needs the work is covering for. The capabilities identified most frequently in the interviews and higher priority in peoples' development are described below in the subsections Oratory, Reading, Behavior and Financial education.

<u>Oratory</u>: All respondents expressed their satisfaction for having developed communication skills and being turned into an effective communicator - *"The part of personal development has helped me a lot. Today I manage to have a conversation about any kind of subject, a nice conversation. I'm not specialist in many things, but I can hold a conversation. On the financial part, I already had a great development*" (M.).

Reading: For all people joining Sunrise company and a way of building knowledge there are clear recommendations of books to read. *"There are also the books they recommend. I don't like reading, but since I've started at Sunrise, I have more than 40 books, already read about 20 of them in these 4 years"* (L.). Many people interviewed had barely read books during their lives and were now reading constantly to learn, acquiring the taste for that, which was not incentivized in the context they`ve grown up or used to live before. *"I was not used to like reading, but I read more than 25 books in 2 years. I had barely read one book in my whole life. I was not used to study, today I do"* (M.). *"I've started to study more. Reading, having a vision, I've started to make reading a habit, and without any doubt, it has changed my mind making me see things I couldn't see until then."* (A. C.).

Behavior: There are many kinds of behavior trainings mentioned by the distributors, which goes from personal sessions to 300 people sessions with highly-skilled trainers. *"They teach us everything. Teach how to behave on a daily basis, to get related /involved to other people, how to behave in a professional meeting, during an interview, for example. In reality, they educate"* (L.), *"Here we learn to be a better person with behavioral education. We learn to teach the others in the team"* (H.). They proudly explain how they have learned to improve dressing codes, to improve relationships with people around them, to be patient and persistent. All of them have mentioned these trainings as very positive and not invasive in their lives.

Financial education: Given that the low level of education also doesn't support this capability, it`s convenient to teach financial education for a salesman job. *"In what concerns finances I think here is a very cool place, which teaches people to deal with money, mainly during the trainings"* (A. C.), *"In relation to finances as well. I've learnt to manage the money, to make money pay in my hands. How to apply money and where"* (L.). People appreciate and seem to learn, recognizing they have never been exposed to this kind of education before.

5 DISCUSSION

This study finally evaluates meaningfulness as a product sold to individuals by companies instead of the view on meaningfulness as a process which is expected to arise on individuals. And it provides density by identifying evidences of multi-dimensional factors involved on the consequences for individuals buying the product of meaning.

The empirical evidences show meaningfulness as product providing extremely positive consequences when they serve as tools for covering social voids and generate social transformation on individuals, observed through empowerment, social belonging, confidence to be an entrepreneur as well as improving skills and capabilities such as interest for literacy / reading, oratory, or behavioral changes. They provide meaningfulness not only through the psychological approach of a subjectivity of work, but rather observed combined to objective and consequences observed in reality.

At the same time, meaningfulness as the end product can be interpreted with its 'dark side' lenses when evidences show a work of exploitation within individuals mainly amongst those in a challenging situation or considered of vulnerability, making institutional and usual the manipulative, exploratory behavior on the part of the employees themselves, as a mandatory condition to grow within the company and realize the wished transformation they bought into. And as such, selling meaning has become practice.

In a nutshell, individuals in a challenging context buy a product of meaning with high expectations of a life transformation. The consequences for individuals might answer to these expectations in the form of positive subjective reward cycles observed through a positive social impact – not necessarily by monetary rewards - or create an unperceived negative behavioral cycle which normalizes an exploratory work and institutionalize its practice, counterbalancing the positive effect on individual and society, named previously.

5.1 Contributions

The empirical material has allowed to develop a model of transformative subjective and objective reward cycles which are complementary amongst them and describe the full experience of meaningfulness lived by the individuals. We also analyze evidences of an emerging economic environment, performing interviews with individuals from low social economic level with a lack of options and a limited support coming from what should be the 'natural' sources of development for individual skills in life, such as schools, family or government support. In this context, the sources and mechanisms capable of generating meaningful experiences at work have been potentialized and blurred between experiences of meaning of work and meaning in life, broadening the spectrum of possibilities on the question of how a sense of meaningfulness arise and persist shedding light into the topic from an emerging context point of view and adding the view of individuals under vulnerable financial situation. This study makes available explicit examples of people who have changed radically their lives by living and having found meaning of work with the researched company. Moreover, the empirical material has allowed interpretation of new sources for meaning, such as the need to be simply seen, visible by society and directed to a context of being recognized as entrepreneur and being part of something. Another source for meaning identified is the feeling of inclusion, of having been given an equal opportunity which doesn't depend on graduation, or previous experience, capacitation or status.

Our research herewith shows evidences of management of meaning being applied under the most authentic possible ways, and going unperceived by the individuals involved. There is a brainwash on values and beliefs, as well as in organizational culture, and all clearly covering social voids in the absence of values and beliefs which could guide these individual's life and career. Based on the evidences collected in the empirical material, it is possible to identify the existence of mismanagement of meaning as the company penetrates in personal and work life not even recognizing these boundaries, simultaneous to the fact that people are taught to explore other individuals for their performance, and, consequently the company's performance, supporting the continuation of the model, so individuals in vulnerable situation are led to buy in a scheme, investing own little money available to work hard towards an ideal imposed by the company context. It provides understanding of meaning of work not as a sole option, but in a context and situation where some basic societal needs are not fulfilled, lack of future perspective and still in a context where this is being strategically used as a tool for organizational profit and exponential business growth, characterizing mismanagement of meanings. This study also brings evidence of a capital of meaning seen through the consumption of meaning of work as the end product and specifically related to emerging economies, which is identified as different from sources and mechanisms able to generate meaning of work in developing economies, where most of the evidences in literature come from.

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APPENDIX A – Interviews details and codings (1097 minutes total interviews)

Coding	Age	Gender	City	Income before joining sunrise - in BRL	Income by interview time - in BRL	Family status	Time working at Sunrise	Occupation before Sunrise	Education degree / Studies	Interview duration
V	62	F	Campinas	estimated 1.000	estimated 1.000	divorced, 3 kids, 3 grandchildren	2y (exclusive 6 months)	restaurant cashier	high school	24min
Pe	28	M	Campinas	1.000	12.000	Married	4 y 9 m	stock assistant	high school	32min
L	30	M	Campinas	2.000	2.500 to 5.000	has girlfriend, no children	3-4 y (left and was back)	worked in a logistics company	graduated in logistics	54min
C	64	F	Campinas	1.000	1.000	widow, 1 son	3 y	cooker at a family house	2nd year university	21min
S	56	F	Vinhedo	2.000	2.000 to 5.000	2 children (1 died)	9 m	commerce, sales - shoes	elementary school	20min
J	31	F	Vinhedo	2000 – broke	14.000	married, 1 child	3-4y	was owner with husband of glass company -construction	high school	1h28min
A	43	F	Vinhedo	2.000 to 3.000	2.000 to 3.000	married, 3 children	3 y	baby sitter	high school	26min
Y	55	F	Itatiba	2.000	2.000	married, 2 children	10m (in parallel to fixed job)	kids van conductor	high school	25min
R	30	F	Vinhedo	2.000	13 to 15.000	divorced, re-married , 1 son	7y	admnistrative assistant	tourisme college	1h12min
H	22	M	São Paulo	1.000	1.500 - 2.000	single, no kids	1 y 1 m	call center operator	elementary school	19min
P	23	M	São Paulo	900	3.000 to 4.000	single, no kids	4 y	stock assistant at shoes store, shopping center	high school	31min
T	41	M	Mariana	working at miner company	800	married, 2 children	3 y 3m (in parallel to fixed job)	Miner	post graduation	29min
A.C.	~30	M	Mariana	1.000	3 to 5.000	Single	5 y (left and come back)	salesman at department store	elementary school	26min

(To be continued)

Coding	Age	Gender	City	Income before joining sunrise - in BRL	Income by interview time - in BRL	Family status	Time working at Sunrise	Occupation before Sunrise	Education degree / Studies	Interview duration
A.L.	50	F	Caninde	700	600	1 son	8 m	teacher at public school	post graduation	21min
J.E	62	M	Botucatu	12.000	12-14.000	1 son	5 y 2 m	city councelor, had a chemical company	university	1h07min
M	21	M	Jau	1.000	4.000-7.000	married, 2 kids	2 y	funeral assistant	elementary school	38min
B.A	35	M	Caruaru	800	More than 10.000	NA	7y	supermarket cashier	elementary school	1h10min
B	21	F	Pres Prudente	1.200	3.000 a 5.000	married, no kids	3y	nursery student	studying nursery at university	1h02min
G	51	M	Pres Prudente	broke	1.000 to 2.000	married , 3 kids	2y	Painter	elementary school	1h06min
F	31	M	Pres Prudente	1.200	10.000	married, no kids	3y	IT programer	graduation	1h05min
N.	51	M	Pres Prudente	broke	5.000	married , 3 kids	2y	owner of painting company	elementary school	1h10min
R.	-	F	Pres Prudente	2.000	4.000	married	2y 2m	commerce , sales	high school	30min
Ni	~45	F	Pres Prudente	3.000	7.000	married , 2 kids	3y (in parallel to fixed job)	pharmacist auxiliar at city hospital	high school	45min
Ma	30	F	Botucatu	3.000	5.000 to 10.000	married with kids	5y (in parallel to fixed job)	music teacher	post graduation	52min
RG	50	F	Vinhedo			married one special child	2 y	Retired	elementary school	20min
E	23	M	Pres Prudente	800	800	single, no kids	5m and left	ifood deliver, gas station attendant	elementary school	24min

Source: Elaborated by the author. 1 BRL = 6,67 EUR for reference.

Sunrise[1] = A pseudonym.