

The experience of meaning at work and in companies: Subsidies of logotherapy and existential analysis



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ABSTRACT

Human beings often devote a significant portion of their lives to work. Given the substantial investment of time, energy, and dedication, it is natural, and

perhaps increasingly so, to have high expectations for professional life in contemporary society. Recognizing the relevance of work in people's lives today, a qualitative narrative review was conducted with the general aim of exploring the potential contributions of Logotherapy and Existential Analysis to the context of work and organizations. The central role of the concept of life meaning in Logotherapy and Existential Analysis contributes to and calls for a consideration of human experience in terms of actions, relationships, and organizational structures. Thus, it is necessary to establish spaces for reflection on the relationship between meaning and work for both men and women in contemporary times. Ultimately, the research reveals that one of the key implications of applying Analytical Existential thought to work and organizations is the proposition of creating more humane companies, which is a necessary requirement for the experience and enhancement of meaning in work and organizations.

Keywords: Meaning, Work, Logotherapy, Existential Analysis.

1 INTRODUCTION

Understanding whether it is worth investing years of study and a significant part of one's life time in something devoid of meaning is a question that instigates reflection on work and the meaning it has in people's lives. It is indisputable that the human being devotes a considerable amount of time to work, especially taking into account the time devoted to preparation and studies required by many professions. Given the investment of time, energy and dedication, it is natural and, possibly, increasingly relevant, that much is expected of professional life in contemporary society. It is easily observed that much of the personal satisfaction is sought through the exercise of a profession.

An individual's work often goes beyond the mere activity itself, as it usually relates to various aspects that give meaning to the experience of working. Work usually connects with people's lives through a series of relationships that generate values and meanings: whether in the relationship with oneself and with others, in the importance and meaning of the creation of a product or service, in the



feeling of being able to contribute to the world through a singular mission, or in the social roles built from the functions and responsibilities performed. All of these relationships intertwine at work and acquire meaning both individually and collectively.

The interaction between work and the meaning attributed to it has gained prominence in the specialized literature on Management and Organizations, since the significant impact that work has on people is recognized. Among the theories that are dedicated to exploring the relationship between the meaning of life and work, it is important to highlight the valuable contribution of the renowned Austrian psychiatrist Viktor Emil Frankl, creator of the therapeutic approach known as Logotherapy and Existential Analysis. Faced with the understanding of the importance of investigating the connection between work and the meaning of life, especially considering the comprehensive impact that work can have on people's lives today, both with regard to the search for existential fulfillment and the possibility of causing suffering, a narrative and descriptive review research was undertaken. The main objective was to identify the potential contributions of Logotherapy and Existential Analysis in the context of work and organizations. In addition, it was sought, through psychological science, to foster the discussion on the humanization of labor relations and promote improvements in the quality of life and health of workers.

After the analysis of the pertinent literature, relevant materials from classic works of Viktor Frankl were identified, as well as significant contributions from contemporary authors who are dedicated to the study and writing about the meaning of work from the perspective of Logotherapy and Existential Analysis. In addition, there was an increase in the importance of the theme of the meaning of work in texts in the area of People Management.

Given this context, this article was structured in order to succinctly address the following themes in the theoretical foundation: the thought of Viktor Frankl, the meaning of work, the meaning of work in the context of organizations, leadership as a promoter of meaning and meaning as a transforming element. Next, the methodological details adopted in this study are presented, followed by the final considerations that address the issues raised throughout the research.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 VIKTOR FRANKL: IDEAS AND THOUGHTS

The renowned Viktor Emil Frankl, a professional with medical training in the fields of psychiatry and neurology, developed a psychological therapeutic method known as Logotherapy. Born in Vienna in 1905, he devoted himself to the studies of Medicine, Psychoanalysis and Psychiatry as he began his academic career. As a PhD holder in Philosophy and Medicine, Frankl shared his expertise at several prestigious universities, including Harvard, Pittsburgh, San Diego, Dallas and the University of Vienna. However, it was during the period between 1942 and 1945 that Frankl experienced what he



himself termed the *Experimentum Crucius* – an experience of survival in the Nazi concentration camps. This traumatic experience was fundamental for the structuring and dissemination of Frankl's thought, consolidating the concept of Logotherapy (FRANKL, 2010).

Parker (2022, p. 01) makes the following comment about Frankl:

In his authoritative and extraordinarily influential book *Man's Search for Meaning*, psychiatrist Viktor Frankl proposed that the task of any individual's life is to find meaning, that meaning cannot be obtained without suffering, and that suffering allows meaning to be identified.

In his theoretical construction, Frankl develops a philosophically based anthropological thought, and a psychotherapeutic approach that would become an alternative to the reductionist tendencies of the science of his time. Thus, Frankl proposes in his theory that the human person is a bio-psycho-spiritual being, free and responsible, and in search of meaning in life. This sense, however, would not be the result of a theoretical or imaginative creation, but of the concreteness of human experience, in the encounter of valuable possibilities to be realized in the uniqueness of each moment and of each singular existence. In the vision of man proposed by Viktor Frankl (2005), the concept of meaning has a central place, being present even in the etymological meaning of the term Logotherapy, which in a few words can be understood as psychotherapy centered on the meaning of life. In contrast to other diverse psychological theories, Logotherapy proposes the will to sense as the main and first force that moves us as human existence. Unlike what renowned authors of psychology, such as Maslow, Freud and Adler, proposed for Frankl (2005), the person is not moved, *a priori*, by a hierarchy of needs, or by a will to pleasure or by a will to power. For Frankl (2005), meaning in life is a central aspect for human development, including understanding it as a fundamental issue for health. Frankl (2005) argues that in the experience of meaning in life, there is a therapeutic and preventive character, and can even be considered as a factor of health protection and psychic hygiene.

For Colombian logotherapist Efrén Martínez Ortiz (2018), living with purpose and meaning means being able to connect the heart and reason to valuable people, actions and objects, and that connecting the heart to what we do means the necessary openness to let ourselves be touched by what is valuable. In this way, the meaning is exclusive and specific, since it needs and can be fulfilled only by each person in his singular existence. The meaning in life, from the understanding of Logotherapy is not, however, something abstract, but rather a concrete relationship of the subject engaged in his reality and in the valuable possibilities that emerge from it.

Life in each specific, unique and unrepeatable reality demands and cries out for an answer. Meaning would be the most appropriate response of personal engagement in relation to concrete life, and as such, it requires from the person an ability to respond guided by values, which in Logotherapy is established by the unfolding of responsibility, as response *hability*, situated in the unrepeatability of



each existence and each situation and guided by values. Frankl also proposes the existence of what he himself calls categories of values. Such categories represent in a didactic way the possible "types" of paths that through them, in the concreteness of life, one can find meaning. These categories of values are three: Creation, Experience, and Attitude. Respectively: 1. Creating a work or practicing an act; 2. Experiencing something or finding someone; 3. For the attitude we take toward inevitable suffering. (FRANKL, 2010)

Although the reflections of the founder of Logotherapy were initially focused on psychotherapeutic intervention, the ramifications of his theory extended far beyond the clinical realm. Quickly, the applicability of his thought in diverse contexts became evident, as several authors, many of them encouraged by Viktor Frankl himself, dedicated themselves to applying Logotherapy and Existential Analysis in areas such as education, health, work and management. This expansion of the scope of Logotherapy reflects its relevance and potential impact on the most varied aspects of the human experience, beyond the strictly therapeutic field.

2.2 THE MEANING OF THE MEANING OF WORK

With regard to the experience of meaning in the professional context, considering the perspective of contemporary society, it is evident the impact that the reality of work can have on people's lives. A relevant aspect is the identity function attributed to work, since a profession or occupation implies a role and, consequently, an assumed social position. Working with meaning implies acting according to creative, experiential and attitudinal values, incorporated in the activities inherent to the work environment.

From a work lived and carried out significantly, it is possible to live what Frankl (2011) points out as "character of something unique", precisely when the response of meaning and mission that can only be given existentially by ourselves is effective. Thus, for the Viennese psychiatrist Viktor Frankl (2010) it would not be the profession, in itself, that would make man irreplaceable; What makes the profession is simply giving you the opportunity to become one. Therefore, it does not depend on the profession itself, but on us, to assert, at work, what is personal and specific in us, giving our existence its "character of something unique". About this relationship, Frankl (2005, p. 26) presents some results of his research:

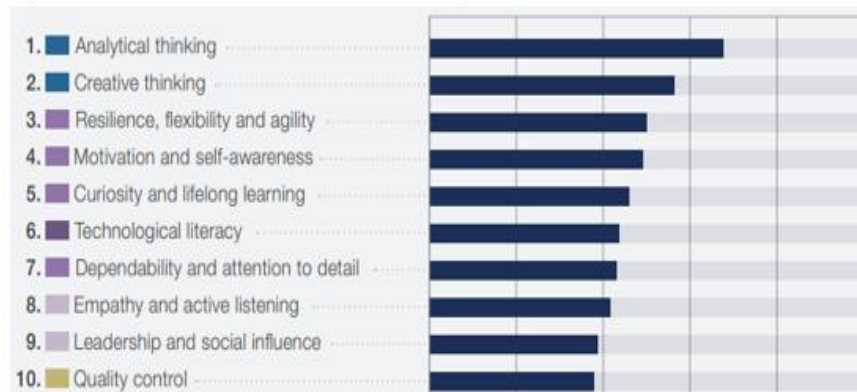
[...] the result of an investigation published by the *American Council on Education*. In 171,509 students evaluated, the highest goal that 68.1% declared to have was: 'the development of a philosophy of life rich in meaning'. Another investigation of 7948 students from 48 colleges was conducted by Johns Hopkins University and sponsored by the National Institute of Mental Hygiene. Of those students, only 16 percent stated that their primary goal was to make money, while 78 percent indicated the following answer: "finding meaning in my life." Similar results were obtained by the University of Michigan: 1533 farmers were asked to grade in order of importance the various aspects of their professional activity and 'good pay' placed only fifth on the overall scale.



In this context, a survey of global scope, carried out in May 2023 by the *World Economic Forum*, established a *ranking* of essential skills for workers, counting on a ratio of twenty-six skills, of which we highlight, in Figure 1, the first ten skills most pointed out by companies in the countries surveyed around the world. The World Economic Forum (2023) report provides important insights into the skills gaps and talent acquisition challenges faced by the surveyed companies. This demonstrates a clear need for retraining in all areas. The fact that 6 out of 10 workers will need reskilling by 2027 is an important statistic that underscores the urgent need for action to meet this demand. However, it is worrying that only half of these workers have access to adequate training. This indicates a mismatch between the demand for *reskilling* and the availability of skill development programs.

Figure 1 - Essential Skills for Workers in 2023

Figura 1 - Habilidades Essenciais para os Trabalhadores em 2023



Fonte: *World Economic Forum (2023)*

Nota: Legenda: Cognitive skills Self-efficacy Technology skills Working with others Management skills

Source: World Economic Forum (2023)

Another relevant point highlighted in the report is the estimate that on average 44% of workers' individual skills need to be updated. This percentage demonstrates the need for a collaborative effort to ensure continuous learning and professional development.

To ensure that workers remain relevant and productive, it is important to implement training programs that meet the current needs of the labor market and that are in tune with the meaning of the meaning of work idealized by employees and companies. Addressing the concept of meaning of work, Ortiz *et al* (2018, p. 41) conceptualize how

The affective-cognitive perception of values that a person has in his work environment and that invite him to act in a particular way in the activities proper to his occupation, giving him to the person, personal identity and coherence with himself and with the organization [...] it is an experience that touches the person, comprises the possibility of expressing himself through work activities and that demarcates a congruence of values that will generate intimate and community resonance.



The authors also propose that the meaning of work depends on a series of sources, the first being personal connection, that is, the fact that work connects with the identity of each person. The second is individuation, which makes a job valuable to the extent that it makes the person autonomous. The third source is communion, that is, work becomes meaningful as it allows for meaningful connections with others and plays an important role for a group or community.

For Ortiz *et al* (2018), the meaning of work is related to greater well-being, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, meaning of life and satisfaction with life in general terms; in addition to higher productivity and better performance. Cancian *et al.* (2023, p. 384) warn that

[...] The subject, when identifying successive dissatisfactions, tends to have a low perception of his quality of life, and consequently can become ill both physically and mentally, thus, the dissatisfactions perceived by this subject can spread, also compromising the quality of life of other employees, making the work environment toxic.

Sisodia and Gelb (2020) state that when there is no meaning and purpose in the environment and in the work context, especially when we feel dehumanized and objectified, the experiences of emotional and spiritual suffering related to the work context become much more evident. The realities of precariousness of work and the consequent damages to the health of the worker are quite varied, a field of study, increasingly indispensable, since we all aspire to a more ethical and humane society.

It is possible to cite as aspects that deserve attention and care: the excess of demands, the non-consideration of individualities, disrespect for fundamental rights, low remuneration, unhealthy environments, situations of moral harassment, non-observation of aspects related to work safety, authoritarian leadership styles, discrimination and prejudice of all types and orders that are still so frequent; moreover it is necessary to mention those sufferings that become chronic, in cases of illness in work relationships, such as the Burnout Syndrome. It is not difficult, therefore, to establish a relationship between the logic of savage capitalism, which places profit and competition above people, and the aforementioned realities of labor suffering.

It is also a matter of logic to affirm that these modes of production of suffering at work, consequently, tend to undermine possibilities of realization of meaning. On this, Sisodia and Gelb (2020) defend the need to demystify and oppose the collective attitude that accepts and even welcomes the idea that this is a cruel and competitive world, and that business is nothing more than a race, a mentality that impoverishes the value of life in the face of work demands, to the extent that it condones the unrestricted submission of labor relations to the logic of production.

According to these scholars, life and work should not be seen as separate entities, but rather as integrated elements. In other words, we seek a work model that encompasses and enhances the vital meanings, while life finds meaning, fulfillment and a place through the work activity itself. The



interconnection between life and work is valued as an approach that promotes integrality and harmony between these fundamental aspects of human existence.

2.3 THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE MEANING OF WORK WITH BUSINESS INSTITUTIONS

It is pertinent to question whether the culture, climate and relationships established in our organizations have been predominantly sources of meaning or suffering. This reflection allows us to analyze the processes of production of subjectivity and the experiences lived in the established organizational relations. It is essential to investigate how these elements influence the construction of meaning in the work context and how they can affect the well-being and satisfaction of the individuals involved.

Companies permeate our lives. More than governments, non-profit organizations or religious institutions, business is a dominant force in contemporary life, whatever the conditions. The way in which they act has an enormous impact on all aspects of our lives: our material well-being, our physical, emotional, mental and spiritual health; and our ability to be present and now as parents, spouses, community members, and citizens. (SISODY; GELB, 2020. p. 22)

The competitiveness rooted in our ways of relating ends up manufacturing desires, standards and ideals that begin to guide references of social production. Companies are sometimes the place where, most clearly, extreme competitiveness is embodied, and often even assumed as a value. The language and ethics that govern labor relations give rise to behaviors analogous to a battle scenario, where one seeks, almost predatorily, to achieve goals and market shares.

On the meaning of life García-Alandete *et al.* (2018, p. 03) warn that: "a low level of meaning in life is related to hopelessness, depression, substance dependence, self-injurious behaviors and suicide, among other variables indicative of psychological dysfunction." Sisodia and Gelb (2020) argue that the human cost of "companies as we know them," which follow the *ethos* and language of competition and domination, is unacceptably high. In their book *Companies that Heal*, the aforementioned authors expose research conducted by Jeffrey Pfeffer, a professor at Stanford University, whose results estimate that stressful work environments are responsible for at least 120 employee deaths each year in the U.S. alone, without considering the experiences of suffering that do not reach death, but are, likewise, devastating. Given the arguments presented, it is necessary to rethink organizations and labor relations, in order to launch an alternative and different look at the logic of wild and predatory capitalism. This is what the authors of the conscious capitalism movement have argued, for example, when they propose that:

The purpose of a company must precede the formulation of corporate strategies and policies and needs to address fundamental questions related to what it means to be human, being directly related to the impact that people – and companies – want to make in the world. (MACKEY; SISODIA *apud* SIQUEIRA, 2020, p.72)



In this sense, it would be necessary to redirect and broaden the view of managers, beyond profit, towards the ethical and respectful care of people, an aspect that should be non-negotiable in the companies' bylaws.

Profits are seen as the means to a greater end, but not as the main end of a business. While long-term profitability is seen as necessary and desirable, short-term profits are not achieved at the expense of ethical and environmental considerations or higher human values such as respect for individuals. (O'TOOLE; VOGEL *apud* SIQUEIRA, 2020, p.72)

Thus, a process of resignification of organizations is defended, with humanization effects, so that these, considered as a place of competition, pressure and anxiety, could gradually become a place of cooperation, appreciation, diversity and sharing of meaning and values. This yearning is well represented by Sisodia and Gelb (2020), when they propose that companies, instead of contributing to people's suffering, could become a place of healing, to the extent that work became a place of creation and sharing of goods, values and growth based on the greater ideals of the common good.

Companies have enormous potential to do good to the world. Much of the good is currently being done 'unconsciously', simply by creating products and services that people value. However, business can also be done much more consciously, with a higher purpose and optimal value creation for all key *stakeholders*, while creating cultures that enhance human development. (SISODY; GELB, 2020 p. 34).

In a very similar line of thought, the professor and important exponent of Logotherapy and Existential Analysis, Alex Pattakos, to whom Viktor Frankl personally entrusted the mission of bringing his thought to the scenario of organizations, defends the urgent need for humanization of companies and labor relations, even under the justification of thus enhancing the experience of meaning in life. In the wake of what Frankl already claimed, in the first half of the twentieth century, when he argued about the need for re-humanization of medicine and psychotherapy, Pattakos (2005, p.06) takes this discourse to the organizational context, presenting the proposal that became his motto: "accompany us in this mission to help change the world, one company at a time."

The logotherapeutic theory applied to the organizational environment ends up highlighting the centrality of meaning in companies and labor relations, and its repercussion on the development of organizations. In this way, the transcendent and significant relationship of work for people and organizations, seen as communities of meaning, is strongly affirmed. To this end, the role of each organization in respecting the dignity of persons, individualities and in considering their needs for the realization of meaning and values is established as non-negotiable. It has been argued, therefore, in favor of a broadening of the vision about what motivates and governs organizations in the last instance. By affirming that companies need to turn beyond profit, turning their attention to employees, it means shifting the gaze of companies to an ethical and teleological principle that, obviously, should underpin



any and all practices of human organization, under penalty of restriction and even obscuration of human potential.

Thus denounces Pattakos (2005) when he states that the hyperintention of people or an organization for profit, causes the distancing of the realization of meaning. When you don't have respect or trust, there's not enough creativity or productivity. Thus, the vicious circle of the emptying of meaning in organizations and work is established.

Our work is always something so much more than simply our work. It is a set of relationships: with ourselves, with others, with our customers, with the products we design, create or sell, with the services we offer, with the environment and with the impact that what we do has on the world. (PATTAKOS, 2005, p. 06)

Relationships acquire meaning in an individual and community way. In work, the specifically human, his personality and uniqueness are closer with the community, with the world; This means that human labor is transcendentalizing; it comes out of itself, it goes to others or to greater goods. (PATTAKOS, 2005) Organizations, therefore, should not be understood only as private companies, but as an organization directly related to its employees, customers, suppliers, partners and governments. An organization must be, first of all, a producer of values, relationships, patterns and dynamics marked by the role and purpose it plays communally. When such relationships become authentic, ethical, democratic, just, based on trust, sharing and cooperation, a true community of meaning is formed. Here is presented, precisely, the self-transcendent character of the realization of meaning, one of the central propositions of Logotherapy. Human existence points and is directed to something or someone other than *itself*, and if this is not recognized, the scope of a humanized reading of human phenomena within our organizations is lost. Thus, each organization has its ecosystem of values, meanings and relationships with the social environment. The mission of managers is to care for and enhance such relationships. For Ortiz *et al* (2018. p. 33),

Companies that get their workers to find meaning in their work often have teams of people who faithfully reflect what the company is. For companies, it is important to give participation to workers in the design of tasks, as this has proven to be a factor that enhances meaning.

This includes building, reframing and adapting relationships; expanding, focusing and connecting perceptions, working with the motivations, strengths and passions of employees. Leaders and their respective teams work in unison (engaged) prioritizing quality at work and full customer service. Rahmadani *et al*. 2020, p. 03) explain how important a positive relationship between a leader and his employees is:

[...] Engaging leaders meet the basic psychological needs of their employees by performing certain leadership behaviors, such as empowering, connecting, and inspiring. When employees are empowered because their supervisor/leader delegates responsible and challenging tasks, they will feel more competent after the task is completed ("Yes, I can").



The offer of products or services by a company also reflects the meaning of the organization. Customers begin to embrace the ideals of the company, paying attention to the values it shares. The customer experience reflects and reveals the value generated by the organization, since each service or product is a faithful reflection of the company's purpose. (PATTAKOS, 2005)

2.4 HOW LEADERSHIP ACTS IN THE PROMOTION OF MEANING

Organizational Culture research is critical to understanding the characteristics and dynamics that shape an organization's current identity. In this context, organizational culture, which reflects the identity of an organization, is developed over time and manifests itself in a set of meanings and practices that connect its members.

Culture is a dynamic phenomenon that surrounds us at all hours, being constantly performed and created by our interactions with others and shaped by leadership behavior, in a set of structures, routines, rules and norms. When one introduces culture into the plane that guides and constrains the behavior of the organization and its internal groups, one can clearly see how culture is created, inserted, engaged, and ultimately manipulated, and at the same time how it restricts, stabilizes, and provides structure and meaning to group members. These dynamic processes of creating and managing culture are the essence of leadership and make us realize that leadership and culture are sides of the same coin. (SCHEIN, 2009, p. 1)

When one speaks of an organizational identity and culture, is it not possible, as if to make an analogy, to understand the organization as a community or a living organism? Therefore, endowed with a "personality" and spiritual needs? Here it is considered necessary to highlight this sense. Costa, Araújo and Ferreira (2021, p. 21) present the following definition of organizational culture:

Set of values, beliefs, habits and rules that the members of an entity learn to respect and execute, seeking to comply with the imposed doctrine and the teachings to the new members, thus generating the values and guidelines of the business environment in which it is inserted.

The proposed parallel seems to have its logic in that organizations are seen as an authentic human phenomenon, arising from the interweaving of the existences that make it up, not only as a sum of individuals, but in the conformation of a significant whole with a very own dynamic.

In this way, the meaning of personal existence, as personal, the sense of the person as personality, is in a reference that goes beyond its limits, pointing to the community, transcends itself the sense of the individual [...]. But it is not only individual existence that needs the community to become the bearer of meaning; The opposite can also be said: the community, in turn, needs individual existence in order to have any meaning. (FRANKL, 2010, p. 115)

If we refer to the organization as a system of interactions, experiences and shared values, which establish favorable or unfavorable environments for the experience of meaning, it is soon noted that the "how" one lives such relations, values and experiences, greatly affect the senses or emptiness lived, and, therefore, the added value (magnifying) or not. Organizations in which the people who form them



have no notion about the meaning in the work, means that these people do not identify with the organization, do not dialogue with the organizational purposes, do not establish a congruence between organizational values with management practices, in them one tends to see a scarcity of experiences of meaning and, therefore, a predominance of experiences of emptiness.

The organization will add value to the extent that its members begin to perceive meaning in what they do, an aspect that has been defended, including, as of important influence for organizational results. Davidescu *et al.* (2020) and Batista *et al.* (2022) define intrinsic job satisfaction as the set of emotions and responses linked to the orientation and adaptation of the worker to work activities, which can influence organizational results. If at work and in organizations people are valued and recognized, it is possible to perceive the care for well-being, if, also, there is room for an integration of individual interests and differences in favor of community ideals, more easily the *stakeholders*, instinctively, will feel that they are part of a significant whole and the organization grows in synergy and cohesion. (PATTAKOS, 2005) In this sense, the leader is the one who has, especially, conditions to establish and promote favorable contexts, or not, to experiences of meaning in an organization. It is the managers who have the most possibilities to make decisions and initiate changes that will directly affect the daily life of the organization.

When a company's leaders put their soul into the work, the expansive effect can be explosive. When the company's management commits to meaning, its employees can find it more easily. But it is not always so, without a doubt that when management does not express interest in values, it is more difficult to honor the meaning of the work. (PATTAKOS, 2005, p. 07)

Thus, the role of the manager or leader as promoter of the development of an organizational culture full of meaning, passes through broad movements and strategies, involving various aspects of the daily life of an organization, being able to make use of relational, structural, operational, financial, affective, cognitive resources, which will become, according to the organizational strategy itself, contexts that foster meaning at work and in the institution. However, it must be pointed out that this does not happen suddenly, it is a broad and comprehensive process and takes time. The culture of an organization is created slowly, over time, by leaders, by workers, in relation to the service and product offered and by events. It is, therefore, something stable, lasting and difficult to change. The transformation of organizational culture requires time and efforts together, and to happen it is important that managers are catalysts for change, also as living depositories of the intended values and behaviors.

In the same way, any process of cultural change or growth, whether organizational or personal, would not take place, in a healthy way, if done vertically, "down the throat". The experiences of meaning can be favored or fostered, but never imposed, as argued by Viktor Frankl (2010), when talking about the process of human development, since the phenomena, genuinely human, such as love,



happiness, meaning or creativity do not happen by orders or commands, but start from the reception and decision of each person.

Thus, the implementation of cultural changes capable of promoting the experience of meaning in organizations requires a considerable investment of time and collective effort, in order to permeate and influence organizational dynamics and relationships. It is relevant to highlight recent data released by the World Economic Forum (2023), which indicate the need to update approximately 44% of workers' skills. In addition to technical and technological skills, the importance of inter-relational skills, such as empathy and active listening, is highlighted as essential elements in the contemporary work environment.

2.5 THE MEANING CHARACTERIZED AS A TRANSFORMING ELEMENT

When one experiences meaning in the personal sphere, this entails profound transformations in the entire existence of an individual, because there is a vital resonance and alignment that creatively reconfigure one's own subjectivity. This experience of meaning is intrinsically linked to the ontological experience, that is, to the ways of being and existential configurations assumed by each person. Viktor Frankl, in this sense, goes beyond a purely structural or physical definition, seeking to understand the human being in his existential essence. He introduces the concept of the "ontology of time," which reveals his particular view of human nature, closely related to his conceptions of temporality. (PEREIRA, 2017)

For Frankl, from the figure of an hourglass, one can weave a reading about human existence as temporality, because Being and Time refer to each other as dynamics, transformation and permanence. The past concerns what has already been accomplished, and in that sense the reality given, or that we are until then. The future refers to the horizon of possibilities, not completely accessible, but which evidences the coming to be of each person, which is beyond what is simply given. The present represents the reality of action, a small beam in which one can effectively move, and from where attitudes can generate new inflows. To exemplify his concept of temporality that articulates with his vision of personhood, Frankl uses the metaphor of the hourglass. In the metaphor, the existential future corresponds to the top of the hourglass, to that sand that will still fall and settle at the bottom, passing through the bottleneck. The central funnel, the narrowest place, Frankl will assign to the present, or, in his words, the bundle of the present. The bottom for Frankl, the sand that has already fallen, would be the past, that which of the possibilities of the future has been realized, and deposited eternally in the past.

The past is filled with realities incorporated into the being, while the demarcation line of the present goes, at every moment, rescuing to reality the possible ones that arrive from the future. For Frankl, the notion that the flow of time orients itself from the present to the future is misguided. The father of logotherapy holds that temporality flows from the present to the past,



from the possible to the real. 'The flow of time is oriented to the past, in which realities are incorporated into the eternity of being.' (PEREIRA, 2017, p. 31)

Therefore, for Frankl (2011), our efforts are always directed to the past: we never act on a future, but on what we wish to preserve as eternal realities in our past. Meaning, in turn, can only be understood as actuality, reality in execution, lived in the unrepeatability of each situation. In this case, values can be defined as those universal of meaning, which have crystallized in the typical situations that society has to face. When there are experiences of meaning, such experiences crystallize and deposit themselves as values in the "granary of the past", starting to configure us as BEING.

What we need is respect for the past, not the future; the past is inevitable, the future, our future is ahead of our decision and our responsibility. From this point of view, it is undoubtedly demonstrated that it is a mistake to say that we are, in the face of the future, responsible for the past. On the contrary, we are precisely responsible, in the face of the inevitable past, for the decisive future. (FRANKL *apud* PEREIRA, 2013, p.26)

When we take responsibility for the past, for what has been lived and accomplished, it is, after all, about what we are and what we receive, live and learn, and we also begin to be guided in the possibilities of our becoming, by these embodied values.

Therefore, values are not only in the past, but also in something distant. These values also become references that can guide us in every decision and for new experiences. There seems to be, therefore, an eminently creative effect and the opening of existential horizons arising from the realization of meaning. When we refer to organizations this reasoning does not seem to differ much. The senses experienced begin to conform us as new experiences and values integrated into what we are as an organization. When this happens, the new experiences of meaning, embodied, crystallized and perpetuated, begin to form the new "personality" of an organization.

In this way, the meaning promoted, potentiated and lived in an organization also becomes an element by nature creative and creative, transformative and transcendent for the organization and its members. Opening up, providing opportunities and enhancing experiences of meaning in an organization implies facing it as an authentic community. A community, unlike a mass, significantly integrates its individuals, while needing individual existence to have any meaning. (FRANKL, 2010)

Meaning, therefore, becomes an element that gathers, integrates and unites the individualities around the construction of values, goods and common meanings, making an ecosystem that enhances the human experience blossom. As Penna states, (*apud* ORTIZ *et al*, 2018, p. 33) "organizations that dedicate resources to creating meaning at work can provide an increase of 55% in motivation, 42% in loyalty, 32% in pride and 20% in productivity".

Finally, studies by Hindi and Frenkel (2022) revealed that companies that promote the meaning of work collaboratively show an average increase of 54% in their productivity, compared to those that



do not adopt this approach. These authors highlight that the practice of collaboration adds significant value by enhancing the company's performance.

3 METHODOLOGY

In order to know the possible contributions of Logotherapy and Existential Analysis to the context of work and organizations, a narrative bibliographic review research was carried out within a qualitative approach. "The bibliographic research has the purpose of collecting, selecting, analyzing and interpreting the existing theoretical contributions on a given subject". (GERHARDT; SILVEIRA, *apud* MOREIRA; MENEGAT, 2022, p.25)

Regarding the qualitative approach, Rhoden and Zancan (2020, p. 02) state that:

Qualitative approaches appear to account for the side not visible and not understood only through equations, means and statistics, that is, in qualitative research, the researcher is concerned with aspects of reality that cannot be quantified, focusing on understanding and explaining the dynamics of social relations.

In this sense, we sought to improve, update and contribute to the knowledge about the theme on screen, analyzing texts of works already published, articles or books and PhD theses. Narrative reviews, although they do not follow systematized protocols for the search and selection of texts, are considered essential for the debate of certain themes, opening possibilities for future approaches, and collaborating for the updating of knowledge. (Smith, 2019)

The review was conducted non-systematically from December 2022 to January 2023. The searches were based on the objective of the research, seeking texts by authors who study the following themes: Logotherapy, Existential Analysis, Leadership, Meaning of Life, Quality of Life, Organizational Culture and Collaboration at Work. We selected works that presented effective reference to the theme addressed in the work, as well as authors from the same theoretical bias and also from other theoretical biases that highlight the theme in question. The bibliographic search was performed in the *Google Scholar* databases and in scientific journals classified primarily with the Qualis A1 or A2 index, complemented with an active search in the reference lists of the selected works.

During the search, works by the founder of Logotherapy, Viktor Frankl, were highlighted, as well as authors such as Alex Pattakos (2005), Ivo Pereira (2017), Efrén Martínez Ortiz *et al* (2018), *García-Alandete et al.* (2018), Rahmadani *et al.* (2020), Sisodia and Gelb (2020), Davidescu *et al.* (2020), Costa *et al.* (2021), Parker (2022) and Cancian *et al.* (2023).

4 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Logotherapy approach applied to work and organizations is intrinsically linked to the search for more humanized organizations. Following Frankl's principles, this approach emphasizes the



importance of placing the human being as a central element, caring, valuing, recognizing and promoting their development. In this sense, leaders and managers focus their efforts on promoting healthy and empowering working relationships. The old maxim that happy people make a company happy, and vice versa, is updated by understanding that organizations that value people, their purposes and senses, reap as a result the value, engagement and performance offered by their employees.

This research emphasizes that the search to build meaning in organizations is, however, not something easy to accomplish, especially because we are talking about a context in which, still, logics and dynamics seem to predominate that, characteristically, tend to reduce the existence of organizations to the purposes of production and profit. When the financial aspect is the only one that defines the meaning of a company, ethical decisions disappear, which disempowers the possibility of making sense. On the other hand, when the driving force of the decision-making process passes from money to people, the possibility of creating an ecosystem favorable to meaning expands.

Thus, the research identified that the arguments presented by the authors of Existential Analysis and Logotherapy reinforce, increase and meet what has been said and defended in current management perspectives: the importance of transforming organizations into more human and ethical places, capable of helping the world and ourselves. And all this converges to managerial models that value and invest in ways to favor relationships and experiences full of meaning in their organizations.

Finally, this research considers that the future of work can be shaped to achieve better results, and that policy decisions, business direction, and investments, all aligned with the decision-making made by leaders today, will determine outcomes and the future landscape for action. In this sense, it is expected that this scientific article will contribute to an ambitious agenda involving multiple stakeholders in order to better prepare workers, companies, governments, educators and civil society for future transformations and enable them to face these social, environmental and technological changes, always taking into account the meaning of work for all involved.



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