ROLES, SOCIAL POSITIONS AND INFLUENCES OF LEADERSHIP IN SIGNIFICANT WORK EXPERIENCES

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This article explores the concept of meaningful work in a multifaceted context, focusing on the different social positions that act as leaders and the roles played by these leaders. The study, carried out with collaborators from Brazilian startups, adopts an exploratory qualitative approach, combined with descriptive elements to capture the essence of meaningful work from the perspective of participants. Thus, its goal was to investigate the relationships between social positions, leadership roles, and meaningful work experiences, providing insights for leaders, human resource managers, and professionals involved in startups.

Method: Qualitative research involved interviews with collaborators from Brazilian startups, exploring significant work experiences. The study adopts a descriptive approach to present the essence of the phenomenon.

Results and Conclusions: The results identified several social positions (manager, colleague, working group, family, etc.) and leadership roles (sensei mentor, inspirational example, etc.) that influence positively or negatively the significant work experiences. Leaders play crucial roles in promoting a meaningful work environment, impacting employees’ perception of the value and significance of their work activities.

Research Implications: The insights in this study offer opportunities for executives, human resource managers and startup leaders to improve work environments by promoting more meaningful experiences for their employees. It also highlights the importance of developing leadership in organizations.

Originality/Value: This study stands out by exploring the intersection between social positions, leadership roles and meaningful work. It contributes to the practical understanding of how different leaders and their functions influence the work experience, offering a valuable and original perspective in the context of Brazilian startups.

Keywords: Meaningful Work, Leadership, Roles, Significant Leadership, Significance.

PAPÉIS, POSIÇÕES SOCIAIS E INFLUÊNCIAS DA LIDERANÇA EM EXPERIÊNCIAS SIGNIFICATIVAS DE TRABALHO

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RESUMO

Objetivo: Este artigo explora o conceito de trabalho significativo em um contexto multifacetado, enfocando as diferentes posições sociais que atuam como lideranças e os papéis desempenhados por essas lideranças. O estudo, realizado com colaboradores de startups brasileiras, adota uma abordagem qualitativa exploratória, combinada com elementos descritivos para capturar a essência do trabalho significativo na perspectiva dos participantes. Sendo assim, seu objetivo foi investigar as relações entre posições sociais, papéis de liderança e experiências significativas de trabalho, proporcionando insights para líderes, gestores de recursos humanos e profissionais envolvidos em startups.

Método: A pesquisa qualitativa envolveu entrevistas com colaboradores de startups brasileiras, explorando experiências de trabalho significativas. O estudo adota uma abordagem descritiva para apresentar a essência do fenômeno.

Resultados e Conclusões: Os resultados identificaram diversas posições sociais (gestor, colega, grupo de trabalho, família, etc.) e papéis de liderança (mentor sensei, exemplo inspirador, etc.) que influenciam positiva ou negativamente as experiências significativas de trabalho. As lideranças desempenham papéis cruciais na promoção de um ambiente de trabalho significativo, impactando a percepção dos colaboradores sobre o valor e significado de suas atividades laborais.

Implicações da Pesquisa: Os insights deste estudo oferecem oportunidades para executivos, gestores de recursos humanos e líderes de startups melhorarem ambientes de trabalho, promovendo experiências mais significativas para seus colaboradores. Além disso, destaca a importância do desenvolvimento de lideranças nas organizações.

Originalidade/Valor: Este estudo destaca-se ao explorar a interseção entre posições sociais, papéis de liderança e trabalho significativo. Contribui para o entendimento prático de como diferentes lideranças e suas funções influenciam a experiência de trabalho, oferecendo uma perspectiva valiosa e original no contexto de startups brasileiras.


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1 INTRODUCTION

Increasingly, the creation of meaning and purpose of the work has been strengthened in management literature (Bailey et al., 2018; Boeck, Dries, & Tierens, 2019; Both-Nwabuwe et al., 2017; Kipfelsberger & Kark, 2018; Lepisto & Pratt, 2017; Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012). Such interest of scholars stems from the fact that a meaningful work (or meaningful work), being a subjective experience of existential meaning, enables the individual to judge the value of his work (Both-Nwabuwe et al., 2017). That is, meaningful work is attributed by the degree with which the employee experiences work as that which is usually meaningful, valuable and worthwhile (Hackman & Oldham, 1975), contributing to his reason for existence in the world.

Research on the meaning of work is the product of a long and rich investigation covering many disciplines. The creation of meaning in work represents a growing line of research and is associated with the concept of meaningful work, from the English meaningful work (Rosso, Dekas, & Wrzesniewski, 2010). The meaningful work means the subjective experience of existential meaning resulting from the fit between the individual and the work (Both-Nwabuwe, Dijkstra, & Beersma, 2017). This experience refers to the process of personal perception about work as a contribution to the person's reason for existence in the world (Both-Nwabuwe, et al., 2017).
Significant work influences individuals and organizations and their research has expanded in recent years due in part to a dissatisfaction with short-term organizational imperatives, concerns about job quality, in employee-employer relationships, and increasing focus on work as an arena for people to find meaning and purpose (Bailey, Yeoman, Madden, Thompson, & Kerridge, 2018; Safwan et al., 2023). Among the countless reflections of significant work, four stand out. First, work-related attitudes and behaviors, such as intrinsic motivation, absenteeism, behavioral involvement, engagement, job satisfaction, empowerment and personal commitment. Second, the issues inherent in organizational performance, related to perceived organizational reputation, career development, knowledge sharing, individual performance perceptions, organizational citizenship behavior, and creativity. Third, existential aspects of which are part of life's meaning, satisfaction with life, work as strengthening of the self, work as a calling, enrichment of professional life, feelings of fulfillment, growth, happiness and blessings. The fourth, and last reflection is well-being (Bailey, Lips, Madden, Yeoman, Thompson, & Chalofsky, 2018; Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012; Rosso et al., 2010).

In view of the above, this study investigated the influence of leadership in the creation of meaningful work, considering as context the contemporary nature of work that forges new and complex systems, bringing implications for the senses and meanings attributed to work (Coutinho, 2009).

2 THEORETICAL FRAME

Initially discussed in 1987 by an international group of researchers, the Meaning of Work (MOW) addresses the fundamental dimensions of the centrality of work, social norms about work and valued results. Connecting to individual ideals, the concept of meaningful work transcends organizational perspectives, entering the subjective spheres of work experiences. In-depth research shows that the significance of work is strongly influenced by leadership, which is a transformative force that shapes and modifies individual perceptions about meaningful work. In this context, this research explores the background and results of meaningful work, highlighting the significant influence of leadership in the construction of these labor meanings.

2.1 Meaningful work: a complex and positive phenomenon

Meaning of work (MOW) is a topic that began to be debated in 1987, with a seminal research commonly cited as an important milestone in the systematization of studies on the meaning of work (Bendassoli, Andrade, Alves, & Torres, 2015). This research was conducted by an international group of researchers responsible for the most extensive contributions to the understanding of the phenomenon worldwide, with the objective of establishing meaningful work patterns and their practical implications. Three main dimensions were found, among them centrality of work, social norms about work and valued results of work. The researchers identified that the meanings of the work are constituted by the individual, collective/group and social meaning; by the usefulness of the work for the organization; by the self-realization and satisfaction generated by the accomplishment of the work; by the feeling of personal and professional development and evolution and by the freedom and autonomy existing for the execution of the work (Silva & Tolfo, 2012; Neto, Santos & Pompeu, 2021).

The concept of meaningful work connects to the particular patterns and ideals of each individual. When it is said that the work is significant, this does not refer to the way the work is conceptualized, but to the way it is evaluated and what derives from this experience (Martela & Pessi, 2018). Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2009) suggest that, to deepen understanding of meaningful work, one of the useful starting points may be to frame it as a property of human beings rather than a dimension of leadership or organization. A work is significant when it
supports some end valued by the individual and when it affirms the individual's connection (Podolny et al., 2004). From this point of view, meaningful work concerns the value of a goal or the purposes of work, judged according to one's own personal ideals or standards (May et al., 2004). That is, meaningful work contributes to a meaningful personal goal and can be differentiated from work that simply makes the individual feel good or from work that allows to express and enhance the talents (Cheney, Zorn, Planalp, & Lair, 2008).

Thus, when one experiences one's work as meaningful, it is an individual subjective experience in relation to the meaning or existential purpose of work (Both-Nwabuwe et al., 2017). The concept therefore finds its roots in the humanities and not in management theory (Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012).

In the literary review by Bailey et al. (2018) there was no consensus on the definition of meaningful work in all revised works. In addition, the authors found that, in quantitative studies, a total of 28 different scales had been used to measure significant work. The authors' analysis resulted in six dominant perspectives with respect to conceptualizations and measures of meaningful work that are a) significance derived from the model of work characteristics (variety of skills, task meaning, task identity, job trust, personal roles, psychological empowerment, among others); b) significance in the literature on spirituality in the workplace; c) meaning within the humanities perspective (meaning creation is a fundamental human characteristic with approaches within the fields of political theory, philosophy, ethics, social and moral); d) meaning as a multifaceted eudaimonic psychological state bond (positive meaning derives from work; between meaning at work and in the broader life of the individual; desire to make a positive impact or contribute to a greater good); e) significance as a specific phenomenon of particular occupations and f) other definitions and conceptualizations associated with personal identity, self-perception and the real role of the individual at work.

The literature on meaningful work also suggests that the core of this phenomenon is the positivity associated with the work of an individual (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017). Experiencing work with meaning brings a positive return and is a significant variable for understanding motivation and well-being at work. For Hackman and Oldham (1975, p. 162), meaningful work is the degree to which the employee experiences work as that which is usually meaningful, valuable, and worthwhile. Psychological significance can be seen as a feeling that one is getting a return on investments in oneself in a currency of physical, cognitive or emotional energy (Kahn, 1990). Ciulla (2000) addresses dignity by stating that meaningful work, as a meaningful life, is morally worthy work. When moral issues are avoided or the ability to act morally is constrained by too much control or by an encouragement to act immorally, they affect the individual's ability to perceive meaning at work (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009). The absence of meaningfulness has powerful ramifications and is one of the main reasons of disengagement of employees in their work, due to the gaps of significance (Kahn, 1990).

The use of the term meaningful in literature usually implies positive meaning. According to Rosso et al. (2010), research on this topic tended to focus on how employees produce or find positive meanings in their work. However, it should be noted that there are differences between the degree of positivity, neutrality and negativity for the concepts of meaning of work, meaningful and meaninglessness. While meaning of work, as well as the meaning attributed to other experiences or domains of life, it can be positive, negative, or neutral (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003), refers to positivity (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017), although unfortunately positivity cannot always be experienced in terms of positive emotions (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003).

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6 Eudaimonia is the happiness that emerges as a function of the satisfaction of organic needs, self-realization or a potential put into practice (Heintzelman & King, 2014 apud Lepisto & Pratt, 2017). It can also be conceptualized as an activity endowed with virtue, that which is worth wishing or having in life (Telfer, 1980 apud Lepisto & Pratt, 2017).
2.2 Leadership and the construction of meaningfulness

Leadership is a process of influence and therefore a force for transformation. According to Ashby (1947), a mathematician who studied self-organizing dynamic systems, the central mechanism of international systems is exchange, as a function of a demand for complementarity. Ashby argues that social influence needs three articulated factors that are "A" that influences "B", and "C" that refers to subjectivity and the set of values and meanings that "B" has, such that it accepts being influenced by "A". Bales (1950) offers an understanding of interactions, in which three classes of interpersonal problems (affection, cognition, and norms of interaction or conaction) arise from the nature of the relationship between the system of interaction (group) and the external situation that the group attempts to master. Lewin (1965) proves, by the Field Theory, that individuals live in groups and each one has interaction resources that promote a network of exchanges, the behavior of the individual being the result of an equation of forces. The literature on leadership as a force of influence is vast and more recent authors, such as Haslam and Reicher (2016), continue to reinforce the nature of this phenomenon. Such authors conceptualize "effective leadership as the ability to influence people in a way that motivates them to contribute to the achievement of the group's goals", seen as the "key process through which people are directed to contribute to collective projects". "Leadership is a process, not a property, and is more like a verb than a noun" (Haslam and Reicher, 2016, p.2 and p.3). Leadership is therefore a force of interpersonal influence, one acting to create in the other the competence to change. In this sense, the raw material of leadership is social interactions.

The influence exerted by leadership has rationalities that give meaning, sharing the instrumentality of adapting individuals to their diversity of interests. The leaders and symbolism of their interpretations, communications, and responses to various events and circumstances of work exert an important influence on the meanings of the followers and play a key role in shaping the work's meaning experience (Kipfelsberger & Kark, 2018; Podolny et al., 2004). Leaders increase the importance of work, changing its meaning. This is an insight that leads to the idea that meaning is flexible, since actions have multiple meanings and each individual can focus more on one action than on another in a particular way (Carton, 2018).

There is substantial interest in the sources of meaningful work (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009) because the restoration of meaning at work is seen as a method to promote an employee's motivation and attachment to work (May et al., 2004).

Bailey et al. (2018) reviewed the literature to find the background and results of meaningful work, as shown below.
According to Bailey et al. (2018), studies focusing on leadership and management have generally found positive associations between meaningful work and leadership styles. Kipfelsberger & Kark (2018) also state that leadership is one of the antecedents of meaningful work, by playing an important role in shaping and influencing the meaning of the work (Rosso et al., 2010).

Amabile and Kramer (2012) warned of the routine possibility that leaders would unwittingly undermine meaningful work by acting as if progress did not matter. Therefore, it is of paramount importance that the leader recognizes the nature of his influence on the meaning of work, in a constructive way. The key challenge for a leader is to manage meaning in a way that individuals self-orient themselves to achieve the desired ends (Smircich & Morgan, 1982).

It seems, therefore, that there is an opportunity to broaden the literature about meaningful work, deepening the understanding of how leaders and their relations with leaders provoke reflections in building the perception of meaningful work.

3 METHODOLOGY

The present research is qualitative in nature, by adopting multimethods of investigation to find the meaning of phenomena and the meanings that people give them (Chizzotti, 2003). The choice was due to the chosen conceptual model, which evaluates meaningful work by a psychological-humanist approach, bringing individuals as constructors of significance, who value their own work by asking themselves: why is it worth doing my job? (Bailey et al., 2018; Boeck et al., 2019; Both-Nwabuwe et al., 2017; Lepisto & Pratt, 2017; Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009; Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012; Martela & Pessi, 2018; May Martela et al., 03; Rosso

It should be noted that meaningful work is a phenomenon linked to individual experiences and therefore the meaning is flexible, since actions have multiple meanings and each individual can focus more on one action than on another in a particular way (Carton, 2018). Due to its breadth, to better understand this phenomenon, it is important to improve the ideas, the reasons and the underlying reasons. Therefore, for the development of the field, the character of the research was, to a large extent, exploratory and, in part, descriptive.

The primary data were obtained mainly by means of semi-structured interviews, leaving room for the full capture of the interviewees’ experiences, at the same time that the focus remained on the exploration of the phenomenon in the light of this study's proposition.
The startups were the contextual choice to represent the contemporary nature of work that forges new and complex work systems, bringing implications for the senses and meanings attributed to work (Coutinho, 2009).

The interviews were carried out with employees of startups, up to 30 years old, without distinction of educational and economic level, workers of Brazilian companies. The choice for this group derived from the interest in knowing the vision about significant work of entrants in the labor market. The participants in the survey were, on average, 26 years old, being 43% women and 57% men, they were workers of 10 startups with, on average, 439 employees.

It should be noted that, as a reference model in the discussion of this research, the Lips-Werma and Wright construct was adopted (2012), recommended by Both-Nwabuwe et al. (2017) in studies aimed at improving understanding of the way in which personal characteristics, tasks and organizational practices create significance for the work. Although the scale of the model that can create greater consistency and integration of results in the field in a quantitative research has not been used, since the approach of this study is qualitative, it was chosen to use the construct of Lips-Werma and Wright (2012), because it is the most evolved conceptual model in its dimensions in relation to previous constructs, such as that of Rosso et al. (2010).

4 RESULTS

The results of this study may broaden the investigations on meaningful work, especially with respect to leadership, addressed in this work as interpersonal influence and transformation force of courses of action attributed to members who structure the experience of significance (Bendassoli & Malvezzi, 2014; Smircich & Morgan, 1982). They can be divided by their theoretical and practical implications, as described below.

4.1 Theoretical Implications

The research revealed that the mobilizing experiences of meaning for the interviewees are mainly related to the dynamics of the individual himself and in relation to others, and bring some theoretical implications.

The evidence of this research points to four major groups of significant experiences that are: i) experiences that stimulate the aggrandizement of the human being, the development of qualities and inner upliftment, with effects on self-confidence, the protagonism of the individual and self-knowledge - Development of the inner self; ii) experiences that allow the expression of talents, creativity and a sense of conquest, being an experience processed in the self, but directed to the outside - Expression of all potential; iii) experiences that represent people's search for a greater goal and therefore beyond the self, to give value to their work, for the benefit of others - Services to others; iv) experiences that harmonize the interviewee with others with other people's principles), as well as the notability to work together with others - Unity with others. The four great perspectives found corroborate the dimensions of the Lips-Werma and Wright (2012) model related to "being and doing" and "me and other".

By the qualitative and descriptive content, the results of the research deepened the understanding of the experiences that increase the significance in each of the dimensions in the vision of workers of Brazilian startups, forming a new spectrum for the research of meaningful work. Lips-Werma and Wright (2012, p. 673),

"depending on one's worldview, the development of the inner self can be based simply on wanting to be a good person, or the best one can be. For some, this may mean..."
The driving experiences of significance revealed by the field in the Development quadrant of the inner self combine the binomial "being" and "self" (or self) and refer to the pursuit of self-knowledge, self-development, learning and evolution as an individual; to fidelity to one's own beliefs, values, principles, purposes and personal desires, and to the pursuit of balance in life.

The second large group of significant driving experiences concerns creativity and achievement, and how much the individual exerts influence, corroborating the Lips-Werma and Wright construct (2012). This dimension refers to the "expression of all potential", which, unlike the "Development of the inner self" (reflective and internal), is active and directed to the outside. The present research puts a lens in the experiences that connect to "doing" and "self" (according to the model of the authors): feeling challenged, doing different and making happen; having aptitude, identification and talent in synergy with the profession; feeling happy and fulfilled; growing in career, and exerting influence in favor of an impact result.

The third dimension, Service to others, is revealed in literature as making a difference and serving the needs of humanity, contributing to the well-being of others (and the world in which we live). This is a dimension that combines "Doing" and "Others", according to Lips-Werma and Wright (2012). The findings of this research confirm that positively impacting, whether that social impact or the well-being of others, is in fact a driver of meaningfulness.

In deepening this dimension, we identified the expression of the significant work of interviewees and managers through their leadership and influence over others, as a way to help someone make a difference in the world. Leadership theory has been widely used as one of the means to explain how levels of meaning can be expanded among followers (Bailey et al., 2018). However, this research finding suggests that the exercise of leadership may influence the perception of more meaningful work for the managing individual himself, by feeling responsible for other people and having a role of enabler and accelerator of careers, contributing to the achievement of others. In this way, there is a potential gap for future studies to observe the contribution of this phenomenon.

Still in the Service to Others quadrant, the field also revealed the exercise of reciprocity and retribution to others as a way to elevate the sense of work, which may inspire new studies correlating literature on reciprocity and meaningful work.

The fourth dimension of the Lips-Werma and Wright model (2012), Unity with others, was also ratified in this research, in which it was found that sharing a purpose, goals and values or working with the power of the collective are the experiences that build significance. They unite the "being" with the "others". 

"Meaningfulness and, particularly, the search for totality, is likely to be a dynamic process in which conscious choices need to be made to continue to integrate different aspects into a coherent whole" (Lips-Werma and Wright, 2012 p. 658). That said, it is worth noting that the present research recognizes the driving experiences of significance in each dimension, but does not explore the tensions between such experiences. Since the referential model presents meaningful work as a "multi-dimensional process of continuous search for coherence through the way individual goals relate to each other and how they relate to inspiration and the reality of circumstances" (Lips-Werma and Wright, 2012 p.659), this analysis opens new fields to investigate and detail the effects of combining the driving experiences of significance. Such research will differ from the original research in that it takes the study of tensions to a second level and not to the level of the large dimensions reported by Lips-Werma and Wright (2012).

The authors also proved that the sustained lack of balance between the driving experiences of significance can lead to the loss of meaningful work and that experiences in...
multiple dimensions of the model contribute to elevate it. Such research can also be carried out at the level of the driving experiences reported in this research, i.e., in defining how much the combination between them raises or reduces the perception of significant work.

The research of meaningful work can also be expanded if one discusses the impacts and correlations of the other two dimensions of the Lips-Werma and Wright construct (2012), reality and inspiration, with the driving experiences of significance for the researched group.

Evidence from literature analyzed by Bailey et al. (2018) suggests that employees are more likely to experience meaning when they connect to diverse sources of meaning. Leadership, understood here as the influence that people exert to direct and regulate the behaviors of others (Bendassoli & Malvezzi, 2014) altering the courses of action, is a great source of meaning.

From the perspective of the interviewees, several are the social positions of people in their relationships that influence perceptions of meaningful work, functioning as meaningful leaders, such as managers, family, coworker, workgroup, celebrity, teacher, friend and manager.

As these groups emerged spontaneously from the interviews, these social positions as sources of meaning for the work were not addressed in depth in the theoretical frame of reference, but about which we discuss briefly below.

This phenomenon that emerged from the field, in which the interviewees experienced significant experiences influenced by these agents, ratifies the study by Rosso et al. (2010) that address how individual interactions and relationships with other people and groups, both inside and outside the work environment, influence the sense of work. Rosso et al. (2010) deal with colleagues, groups and communities, family, and managers, who will be treated later as sources of meaning.

In addition to social positions, the roles that such social positions assume and exert influence in the sense of work, which can be understood as tactics to increase the significance of work, were also found in the field. They are: a) Mentor Sensei: exerts influence in the interviewees by promoting significant experiences related, mainly, to the pursuit of learning, which result in new ways of acting, making decisions and behaving; b) Inspiring examples: they are reason for inspiration for the interviewees, who give them merits for their values and behaviors, for being a reference in the profession, for the trajectory of ascension and overcoming, for broad and deep knowledge, for excellence in working and leading people. They are examples of overcoming and are differentiated in relation to other professionals. c) Career promoter: they stimulate the aggrandizement and advancement of the career of individuals, serving as propelling levers and directly related to the professional ascension of the interviewees, opening spaces of visibility, delegation and opportunities, talking openly about the career of the interviewees, making them feel protagonists of their achievements and their future, advisers and career counselors; d) Close Connector: they easily demonstrate their vulnerabilities and weaknesses, increase the reciprocity of the relationship and see the interviewees beyond the professional activities that they carry out, recognizing the emotions and needs of individuals; e) Encouraging Support: support and encourage decisions and serve as stimuli for respondents, directly interfering in the choices of respondents to grow in their career, whether through career choices or financial investment. They act behind the scenes.

Co-workers can have a strong influence on the direction of work (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). Rosso et al. (2010) present several theoretical lines that demonstrate how colleagues confer a positive impact on the perception of significance, among them: i) opportunities for employees to express themselves and strengthen identity values in the work; ii) interference in the interpersonal process of meaning-building (as free translation of "sensemaking"), in which the behavior of colleagues is clue about how to think and behave, drawing, from this, their own
attitudes, interpretations and sense to the work and influencing perception about the rules of the environment and perception about the work itself. The data found in this research revealed that, in addition to influencing the perception of how to do things in the professional environment, co-workers contribute to self-development, learning, the inner evolution of the individual and the growth of his career. In this sense, the findings of this research indicate new possibilities to investigate the influences of colleagues on the development of the inner self and the expression of the individual's potential.

The working groups stood out as social positions that have the potential to drive the meaningful work of the respondents, recognizing in the groups a collective force and potential for work towards common goals. Groups and communities were also influencers of meaning addressed by Rosso et al. (2010, p. 101). These authors define the groups as "a set of two or more people who are engaged in a common activity or share a common identity or goals". Several authors cited by Rosso et al. (2010), among them Pratt & Ashforth (2003) and Wrzesniewski et al. (2003), have demonstrated that the roles of individuals and the sense of identification with the groups of which they are part have significant potential to impact the levels of significance they perceive in their work.

Besides the interpersonal relationships developed in the work environment, other social positions outside these borders also influence the meaning of the work, according to the data obtained in the research, such as family, friend, teachers and celebrities.

Regarding the family, Rosso et al. (2010, p. 102) have compiled several studies that address the influence of this social position on work, describing the various ways in which the family can influence the meaning of work, among them:

"work overload through the demand for time, energy and economic resources; a supportive and relaxing environment in which a person can recover from the demands of work, expressing admiration, respect and love [for the person]; stating that what [someone] said and did was right; and giving assistance, such as money, time, work or information."

The data from this research confirm that the family plays an encouraging supporting role, recognizing it as a stabilizer for work, an investor and as inspiration for career, supporting and encouraging decisions. However, they have also brought indications that family members may play the roles of sensei mentors and inspiring examples, serving as references and career counselors, which can broaden discussion about the family's influence on meaningful work.

Friends, teachers and celebrities have been found in positions that may interfere with the production of significance of work, but no studies have been identified that correlate meaningful work to these social positions, and may therefore serve as inspirations for future research.

All the interviewees, without exception, cited the managers as a strong influence in their significant work experiences, confirming the relevance that is given to this social position in countless studies, as presented in the theoretical framework. The literature on the relationship between meaningful work and leadership is very rich in associating these two concepts and considers leadership as background to meaningful work (Bailey et al., 2018).

Generally speaking, social positions and their interferences are already well covered by current literature. However, something has emerged from the data in an unexpected way and has to do with the potential roles that these significant leaders assume in influencing meaningful work. Once such roles emerged from the field, it was necessary to seek Role Theory to understand the topic.

The Theory of Roles emerged as a conceptual lens to unveil how interactive processes among members of a social system occur to shape decisions, define diadic or group-level
behavior patterns. Such interactive processes unfold through the development of "roles" and "role expectations" (Biddle, 2013; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Paper Theory suggests that individuals behave according to the functional, relational, and structural characteristics of the social unit in which they coexist (Biddle, 2013; Katz & Kahn, 1978). Biddle (2013) clarifies the roles by assuming that people are members of social positions and have expectations for their own and others' behaviors.

All reported roles require significant leadership skills and skills and suggest that, for the most part, they are tied to soft skills. Added to this is the concept of meaningful work brought by Both-Nwabuwe et al. (2017, p. 7) which state that "when one experiences one's work as meaningful, that is an individual subjective experience in relation to the existential meaning or purpose of work". That is, this concept finds its roots in the field of study of the humanities, rather than management theory. Combining the competencies and skills of significant leaders with the significant experiences they affect, new opportunities for discussion in psychological-humanist theory have been unveiled to deepen the mapping of such competencies and skills, as well as their effects on meaningful work.

Broadening the discussion from another angle - that of the significant experiences affected by each role - one can understand that "seeking self-knowledge, self-development, learning and evolution as an individual" (developing the inner self) and "growing in the career" (expression of all potential) are experiences influenced by all roles. As a counterpoint, some experiences are affected only by one role: "to be true to one's own beliefs, values, principles, purposes and personal desires", "to feel happy and fulfilled", "to reciprocate and be reciprocal", by the encouraging support; "to impact positively", by the inspiring example and "to work with the power of the collective", by the sensei mentor.

By expanding the analysis to the dimensions of meaningful work, it was realized that any of the roles fully affect the experiences aimed at the individual, correlated to the self, which no longer happens in the dimensions in which the "other" is involved. This phenomenon has the potential to be researched in future investigations.

Finally, in the light of the discussions presented, it is possible to propose a model that reveals that the roles of significant leaders are the means by which the various social positions impact the perception of meaningful work, demonstrating the respective relationships between the social positions, the roles they assume and the dimensions of meaningful work they influence.
Figure 2: Construct meaningful leadership: roles and social positions and their influences on meaningful experiences

Source: Self-authored, 2023

7 Legend: DEI - Development of the inner self / ETP - Expression of all potential / SAO - Service to others / UCO - Unit with others
4.2 Practical Implications

The field of research intended to understand what is valued by professionals in their work environments is already very extensive. However, the present study addresses a nuance not present in the literature, produced by scholars of the generations, namely, work with a significant purpose (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003) or meaningful work.

In this sense, there is great potential for C-level executives, human resources areas and startup managers to use the insights from this research to favor and stimulate sense-driving experiences for professionals. Mindful of these insights, these influencing agents can enhance realities, environments, and work relationships, driving insights into what makes work dignified and valuable.

In addition, this study can be a potential guide for the development of leadership (formal and informal) in startups and other organizations, accelerating the adoption of significant roles in executive education. Consultations can also find relevance in the concepts dealt with here.

As this is a study that involves social positions other than managers, another group that could benefit from this study are teachers, by broadening their vision for the influence they exert on the significant work experience for the interviewees.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The main theoretical foundations underpinning the present work are research on meaningful work, including the main conclusions of previous studies on the impact of leadership on meaningful work. Among the authors of this theoretical line were mainly the references of Lepisto & Pratt, (2017); Pratt & Ashforth, (2003); Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2009); Both-Nwabuwe, et al. (2017), Bailey et al. (2018); Rosso et al., (2010) and Lips-Wiersma & Wright, (2012), whose construct was used as a reference after the data analysis.

Some theorists who related leadership to meaningful work were also included, with particular emphasis on the articles by Bailey et. al. (2018) and Rosso et al. (2010), which highlight leadership and management as antecedents of meaningful work. Besides them, theorists such as Ashby (1947), Bales (1950), Lewin (1965), Haslam and Reicher (2016), Smircich and Morgan (1982), (Kipfelsberger & Kark (2018), Podolny et al. (2004) and Carton (2018) are cited as bringing discussions about leadership as an influence and a force of transformation, as well as a creator of meaning. After the data analysis, the stage at which the roles of significant leaders emerged, the theoretical basis of the Theory of Roles (or Role Theory), anchored by scholars Biddle, (2013), Georgakakis et al. (2019) and Guirguis & Chewning (2005), was also used.

First, it was demonstrated how the participants of the research perceived the daily experiences that drive the significance of the work, which were called significant experiences. The research demonstrated four major groups of significant experiences that were: i) experiences that stimulate the aggrandizement of the human being, the development of qualities and inner upliftment, with effects on self-confidence, the protagonism of the individual and self-knowledge - Development of the inner self; ii) experiences that allow the expression of talents, creativity and a sense of conquest, being an experience processed in the self but directed to the outside - Expression of all potential; iii) experiences that represent people's search for a greater goal and therefore beyond the self, to give value to their work, for the benefit of others - Services to others and iv) experiences that harmonize the intervieweieveidences with others people), as well as the notability of working together with others - Unit with others. The four great perspectives found corroborate the dimensions of the Lips-Werma and Wright (2012) model related to "Being and Doing" and "Me and Other".

Second, the diverse social positions and roles of significant leaders that influence the participants in the research throughout their careers were demonstrated, influences that resulted
in significant, transformative and valuable experiences. Social position is understood in this survey as the position that significant leadership occupies in the professional history of the individual, according to the perspective of the interviewee himself and the roles as those determined by interpersonal interaction between interviewees and significant leaders, defined by relational aspects such as emotions, motivation, trust and identity (Stryker & Serpe, 1982). As results, managers, co-workers, working groups, family, friends, celebrities and teachers were found among the social positions. Significant leadership roles that influence high-significance experiences include the sensei mentor, inspirational example, career driver, close connector, and encouraging support.

Third, the interferences of these leaders in significant experiences and the impacts of the influence on the significance of the work of the research participants are clarified, resulting in a positive transformation or meaning experience for these individuals, as well as the correlations between roles and dimensions of meaningful work, as well as in the final model presented.

Fourth, a model is presented that proposes that roles can be the means by which the various social positions extend the significance of work, influencing the perceptions of a more meaningful work in the dimensions of meaningful work.

This study sheds light on the theory of meaningful work and the influences and interactions between individuals that affect perception about meaningful work.

Future research could possibly look in more detail at the relationships between the theory of meaningful work and Role Theory, to further explore role interference in creating more meaningful work.

At the same time, future studies on meaningful work can deepen the reflective effect of the exercise of management leadership on the perception of more meaningful work for the manager himself who, by feeling responsible for the career and accomplishment of others, can have his own perception of meaningful work increased.

Other future contributions may broaden this study by correlating literature on reciprocity, vulnerability and other soft skills with meaningful work.

Finally, further investigations may detail the effects of combining the driving experiences of significance, noting their tensions. Such research will differ from the original research in that it takes the study of tensions on a second level and not on the level of large dimensions reported by Lips-Werma and Wright (2012). Such a construct can also be explored by observing the other two dimensions, "reality" and "inspiration", in relation to the experiences that drive significance for the researched group.

However, this study also has some limitations. The research that supported it was based on the descriptive approach that seeks to be faithful in describing the essence of a phenomenon as revealed in human consciousness (Nam, 2020), avoiding the subjectivity of the researcher. Once the lived experience is described, the hidden meaning will come by repeated reflection on collective memories goes, which, through similarities in the data, leading to an understanding of the phenomenon. However, the research process is not linear but iterative, at which point an interpretation bias can arise in an unconscious exercise of reflexivity.

A second advent is that, since the beginning of 2020, due to social remoteness due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it has been necessary to conduct all interviews by videoconferencing, which has limited observations regarding nonverbal communications and other important evidence in interacting with respondents.

A third point that should be noted is that it was not the subject of this research to detail how the environment influenced the meaningful work from the perspective of the interviewees. Consequently, there is no detailing of this influence on research findings that the generalizations made in this research - whether referring to the drivers of significance
(meaningful experiences), as well as to the social positions and roles of significant leadership - need statistical validation, since the sample is relatively small

REFERENCES


