Humanization in the corporate environment: the experience of the reading lab at Natura

Humanização no ambiente corporativo: a experiência do laboratório de leitura na Natura

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the potential of the Reading Laboratory methodology as a promoter of humanization in the corporate environment and discuss the development of these practices as part of the strategy of organizations based on the experience at Natura. This work extends humanization studies from the health area, where the Reading Laboratory has been applied since 2003, to business administration. It broadens the framework of methodologies and human and social management practices in organizations. It raises the issue of dehumanization in the context of modernity, its effects, and its reach on organizations as part of society. The methodology of the intervention was the Reading Lab, applied in three cycles at Natura, with the voluntary participation of 38 employees, in 17 meetings over three semesters. Data collection and analysis followed qualitative research protocols. From the records of the meetings and interviews with ten participants of the Reading Lab, the phenomenological-hermeneutic approach was adopted to interpret the narratives and evaluate the results. The study concludes that the Reading Lab promotes humanization in the corporate environment through the aesthetic-reflective effect provoked by Literature and advocates the development of management practices based on the Humanities as an effective humanization strategy. The study indicates a way for companies to engage with this agenda through competitive advantage and proposes its discussion as a dimension of corporate responsibilities.

Keywords: Humanization; Literature; Narrative; Hermeneutic phenomenology; Corporate responsibility.

RESUMO

Este estudo propõe a investigação do potencial da metodologia do Laboratório de Leitura como promotora de humanização no ambiente corporativo, e a discussão destas práticas como parte da estratégia das organizações, a partir da experiência na Natura. Este trabalho estende o campo de estudos da humanização, da área da saúde, onde o Laboratório de Leitura é aplicado desde 2003, para o âmbito da administração de empresas. Amplia o arcabouço de metodologias e práticas de gestão humana e social nas organizações. Levanta a questão da desumanização no contexto da modernidade, seus efeitos e sua abrangência sobre as organizações como parte da sociedade. A metodologia da intervenção foi o Laboratório de Leitura, aplicado em três ciclos na empresa Natura, com a participação voluntária de 38 colaboradores, em 17 encontros ao longo de três semestres. A coleta e análise de dados seguiu protocolos da pesquisa qualitativa. A partir dos registros dos encontros e entrevistas com dez participantes do Laboratório de Leitura, adotou-se a abordagem fenomenológico--hermenêutica para interpretação das narrativas e avaliação dos resultados. O estudo conclui que o Laboratório de Leitura promove a humanização no ambiente corporativo, através do efeito estético-reflexivo provocado pela Literatura, e preconiza o desenvolvimento de práticas de gestão baseadas nas Humanidades, como estratégia efetiva de humanização. O estudo indica um caminho de engajamento das empresas nesta agenda pela via da vantagem competitiva, e propõe sua discussão como uma dimensão das responsabilidades corporativas.

Palavras-chave: Humanização; Literatura; Narrativa; Fenomenologia hermenêutica; Responsabilidade corporativa.

1. INTRODUCTION

The humanization theme is increasingly present in the business administration field, whether in corporate management literature, such as the book "Humanized Companies" by Sisodia, Wolfe, and Sheth (2017), which had a significant impact and stimulated the creation of Conscious Capitalism movement in Brazil, and the research "Humanized" (Paro, Caetano & Gerolamo, 2019), whether in events such as the National Congress on Human Resources Management (CONARH), coordinated by the Brazilian Association of Human Resources (ABRH), which had "Humanize" as its theme, or in the wide range of initiatives in people management and marketing strategies that adopt this terminology.

In addition to the private segment, this theme has been subject of studies and practices - especially in the educational area of the health segment - and of public policies, highlighting the National Humanization Policy (PNH), current in Brazil between 2003 and 2016, which defined guidelines for the humanization of health services and care in the public sphere (Brazil, 2013). These initiatives start from several assumptions and concepts that, despite having humanization as their axis, adopt very different approaches. Therefore, as a first step, we will define this study's conceptual foundations to understand a method developed in the Social and Human Sciences field.

The word **humanization** probably entered in our vocabulary from a neologism that appeared in the French language in the 19th century and spread internationally after the Second World War (Lang, 2010). In our environment, the term began to gain prominence at the turn of this century, when it began to be widely used in the health field (Benevides & Passos, 2005). Since then, it has been gradually established in the corporate environment. However, it is common that the generalization of a term or concept in a given environment is accompanied by a tendency towards trivialization and almost indiscriminate use without adequately understanding what this word really means and the problem it addresses. Well-intentioned generic terms, however, without a solid epistemological foundation, seem to prevail, resulting in often superficial initiatives that do not have an effective and sustainable long-term impact and therefore do not constitute effective strategies for humanization.

This study adopts an anthropological perspective to understand humanization based on Montesquieu's (2005) formulation of the **expansion of the sphere of being.** For the 18th-century French philosopher, human beings humanize by expanding their sensory, affective, cognitive, and relational experiences. To be human, being alive is not enough. It is necessary to exist, that is, to live experiences, to expand the field of vision, sensations, feelings, thoughts, and knowledge, and then to carry out the critical integration of all these experiences in consciousness formation. On the other hand, dehumanization is the reverse process, which we consider a **reduction of the sphere of being.** According to Gallian, Pondé, and Ruiz (2012), dehumanization can be understood as a consequence of the excessive rationalization and technification of life, a result of modernity.

With deep roots in Renaissance humanism, which rescued the idea of human perfectibility from the Greek classics (Passamore, 2004), modernity has been established as the dominant philosophical matrix until today. One of its faces is the rationalization of work, reinforced after the Industrial Revolution, driven by Taylorism and Fordism in the 20th century, which has shaped the large-scale production model. Chaplin in Modern Times brilliantly represented this model, characterized by specialization and standardization of repetitive and meaningless tasks. Today, we can imagine a **21st-century version** produced in the office of a global corporation, where managers replace workers. Computers, smartphones, and the internet blur the boundaries of work time and space, and the term **digital Taylorism** (The Economist, 2015) describes this image. As Montesquieu elaborated, this process can be profoundly dehumanizing since it disregards man's fundamental essence as a being endowed with affection, intelligence, and will.

According to Gallian et al. (2012), dehumanization brings serious consequences; we can associate it with depression, loneliness, panic, among other psychological pathologies. Burnout is part of this scenario and has recently been recognized as an occupational disease by the World Health Organization. Exhaustion, fatigue, and anxiety are symptoms of burnout, associated with chronic stress in the workplace, significantly impacting both individuals and organizations, causing low productivity, high turnover, and loss of talent (Garton, 2017), even affecting employees firmly committed to the companies (Seppälä & Moeller, 2018). The concern for mental health is a growing agenda in society and business and is currently widely covered in numerous scientific studies, business articles, and the lay press.

Companies react to this issue in various ways, such as improving the work environment, increasing flexible work hours, and expanding home offices, investing in more participative and motivational leadership training, and implementing wellness and health-promoting activities such as yoga, meditation, and mindfulness. While all these initiatives bring benefits, they are limited to a technical-functional perspective and overvalue the cognitive and behavioral dimensions of the human being. An effective humanization strategy must go beyond this and include the affective and reflective

dimensions, and it is from the field of health and education that we bring an answer. The Humanities Laboratory (Gallian, 2017), developed in 2003 at the Center of History and Philosophy (CeHFi) of the Federal University of São Paulo (Unifesp), is the methodology of the intervention implemented at Natura.

The method consists of mobilizing three dimensions of human experience: affection, intelligence, and will, based on the aesthetic-reflective experience of reading the literary classics, aesthetics understood by the meaning of its Greek root (*aesthesis* = awakening). Thus, the knowledge provided by the Humanities Laboratory should be understood through a phenomenological-hermeneutic approach, valuing the symbolic and interpretative content of personal character. One of the best expressions we have found to express the ideas underlying this proposal belongs to Compagnon (2012), for whom "the masterpieces of literature say much more about man and nature than the serious works of philosophy, history, and criticism", referring to Zola.

Over time, the methodology evolved, incorporating various adaptations, and transcending the academic and health fields. The expansion into the corporate environment occurred with the pioneering work carried out at Natura in 2012 and 2013, which is the subject of this study. This first experience had the support of the company's Human Resources team, which recognized the experimental and academic nature of the research but also understood the potential of the proposal in the corporate atmosphere. The activity occurred in the company as part of a human development program called **Cosmos**. Subsequently, organizations from different sectors of the economy in Brazil, such as financial, industrial, and pharmaceutical companies, implemented the methodology: Bradesco, Santander, BB Mapfre, Sicredi, Banco do Brasil, Porto Seguro Seguradora, C&A, Capgemini, Jacto, Ferring and Adium. When discussed and applied in the academic field, the Reading Lab (LabLei) is also called Humanities Lab (LabHum).

Currently, dozens of studies focusing on the method's application in different educational and health environments were already published and can be divided into two groups: theoretical-conceptual and empirical-experimental. The present work is in this last group. It aims to test the hypothesis that LabLei methodology can also be applied in private companies (corporate environment), generating a humanizing experience based on the presentation and analysis of a successful experience in Natura. In addition, we also explore alternatives for developing humanization practices as an integral part of the organizations' strategy.

2. THEORETICAL REFERENCE

Dealing with the theme of humanization within corporations requires articulating concepts and theories from several disciplines, from Social Sciences and Humanities with business administration. This articulation can be multi-, pluri-, trans- or interdisciplinary. Following Faria's definitions (2020), we consider that this articulation is interdisciplinary since the knowledge of this subject goes beyond the boundaries of several disciplines, demanding the interaction of several areas of expertise in the humanization phenomenon study in such a way that the topics must converge. It is from this point of view that we value the contributions of Philosophy, Sociology, and Anthropology, and develop the theoretical framework of this study, taking on the task of building bridges between the social sciences and humanities and the management field to realize the challenge of understanding what is proper to the human being in the corporate environment.

2.1. Humanization and literature

To support the understanding of a humanization methodology based on the humanities, we find in Coelho (2001) a conception of human life as an experience of the diffuse and indeterminate, which requires a colorful vision of reality. From this point of view, the humanities understood here as the arts, literature, and philosophy, appear as mediators of this reality. Literature - especially classical works, because they are timeless and universal and transcend historical and cultural circumstances (Calvino, 2007) - is a privileged instrument of this strategy. From this perspective, we theoretically base the methodology of LabLei on Montesquieu's (2005) formulation of the **expansion of the sphere of being**, which is the result of an experience involving the three dimensions that, according to Aristotle, characterize the human being: affection, intelligence and will. Humanization, founded in this way, is linked to the recognition of the essence of **the human being**, which comes from the dimension of feeling that qualifies reason and mobilizes the will. LabLei mobilizes these dimensions, promoting a humanizing aesthetic-reflective experience that favors critical thinking. LabLei methodology development studies focus on this theoretical basis.

2.2. Studies in Health and Education

The study of humanization in the business field is in its embryonic stage. Therefore, we will find the main contributions to this topic in health and education. In Brazil, the CeHFi of Unifesp stands out as the leading producer of knowledge in this area, within the research line "Humanities, Narratives, and Humanization in Healthcare." As theoretical references for

the application of LabLei methodology in this work, we highlight the studies of Bittar, Sousa, and Gallian (2013) with students and health professionals in a university educational context; Logatti et al. (2019), with a psychotherapy group; and Mituti, Sass, and Gallian (2021), with a group of mothers of people with disabilities. These studies confirmed the humanizing effect of the method.

In business education, Póvoa Neto (2021) studied classical literature as fuel for reflective experience and how this practice contributes to training and transformation in business education. The research examined the application of the LabLei methodology in two postgraduate business education programs directed to shareholders, board members, executive directors, and CEOs of companies. The research confirmed that the method promotes critical reflection in the corporate environment in the context of personal change.

In the ethics area, we also found significant potential for literature to contribute to the management education process. Classical literary narratives provide an opportunity for moral reflection when we put ourselves in the characters' shoes as they face dilemmas at crucial moments in the stories and then critically evaluate our behavior in similar circumstances. In this line, Rolim (2022) investigated this effect in a group of MBA and Executive Education students from a business school in Brazil; the study evidenced that reading the classics positively influences the level of moral judgment in decision-making and is a tool for empowering ethical conduct in the corporate environment.

3. METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

In the following, we describe the steps we took in this study that led to the results, briefly presented below, and support the conclusions. We organized this journey into four stages: intervention; collection approach and data analysis; data collection; analysis, and interpretation.

3.1. Intervention

The intervention in Natura followed LabLei's methodological procedures and it is a pioneering study in applying the methodology in the corporate environment. Natura is a leading cosmetics company known for its corporate social and environmental responsibility and engagement with the ESG agenda. LabLei proposes is to promote humanization through a humanistic approach that uses classical literature as a basis for analysis. This criterion is based on the potential of the classics to provoke an aesthetic-reflective experience in the affective, intellectual, and volitional dimensions, as proposed by Montesquieu for the **expansion of the sphere of existence**.

Gallian's (2017) work presents a detailed description of the method, which begins with the pre-reading of a classical work selected by the activity coordinator. Each book corresponds to a reading cycle; the dynamic generally envolves groups of ten to 15 people meeting for six sessions of 90 to 120 minutes, led by an external coordinator. Three stages compose each cycle (Table 1).

Table 1

Reading cycles stages

Stages	Description of the method	Meetings
1 - Reading histories	Participants are invited to share their main impressions about the text, focusing on their self-perception of the feelings experienced during the reading. At this point, we avoid any critical-analytical approach, privileging the accounts' subjectivity, spontaneity, and frankness. This stage corresponds to the affective dimension of the humanization process.	1st meeting
2 - Discussion itinerary	The coordinator divides the text into parts or chapters for each meeting and encourages collective reflection on the work, promoting the intellectual dimension of humanization. The emergence of new perspectives on the text, based on the exchanges between the participants, is notable, naturally prompting empathy and reflective deepening. This stage is particularly important in the process and requires the coordinator's skill.	2nd to 5th meeting
3 - Coexistence histories	Privileges the voluntary dimension of humanization through self-evaluation of the experience. We expect affective and intellectual knowledge awareness in this stage, completing the dynamic.	6th meeting

3.2. Approach to data collection and analysis

As an introduction to the approach taken for data collection and analysis, we will briefly discuss the assumptions of qualitative research that we adopt in this work.

3.2.1. Qualitative research

According to Bertero (2020), the type of knowledge, we call science emerged in the 16th and 17th centuries and started in Physics, specifically in Mechanics. The scientific method developed and expanded, encompassing Chemistry, Biology, and Astrophysics, giving rise to Natural Sciences. The objectivity of the scientific method - which introduced rules and procedures that allowed experiments to be demonstrated and reproduced - was a success and consolidated as an alternative to philosophical speculation, chronicles, and reports to analyze and describe phenomena. In the late 18th and 19th centuries, Sociology, Psychology, Anthropology, and History emerged, which were also influenced by the scientific method originating from Natural Sciences. Modernity developed during this period, privileging quantitative approaches. However, when dealing more deeply with the complexity and ambiguity of the human universe, we face the limitations of these approaches and resort to qualitative research as a theoretical reference for data collection and analysis in this work.

Minayo (2021) assures us of this choice when she states that the object of Social Sciences is essentially qualitative. According to her, qualitative research addresses very particular questions, dealing with the universe of meanings, motives, aspirations, beliefs, values, and attitudes, and cites Lévi-Strauss (1975): "In a science where the observer is of the same nature as the object, and the observer is himself a part of his observation" (p. 215). For her, the universe of human production – which can be summarized in the world of relationships, representations, and intentionality and is the object of qualitative research – can hardly be translated into numbers and quantitative indicators.

Godoy and Brunstein (2020) engage with this view and provide a very enlightening understanding of qualitative research as a type of "intellectual craftsmanship" and the researcher as a bricoleur. We highlight here some characteristics they consider fundamental in qualitative research: using multiple research methods and strategies, being emergent rather than rigidly established, and being fundamentally interpretative. According to the authors:

> Qualitative research studies things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to

them. It involves collecting detailed data, usually through open-ended and relatively unstructured interviewing, ethnographic observation, participant observation, or archival research, to understand the complexities of social life. The aim is to produce a contextual and holistic account or description of the phenomenon under study based on rich and detailed data and an interpretive approach rather than a reductive analysis (Godoy & Brunstein, 2020, p. 31).

Data are obtained interactively, with special ethical care towards research participants and an understanding of the complexity of human experience. Data generation is flexible and based on a systematic and rigorous work plan. The cognitive comprehension process is present during data collection and analysis, aiming to find variations and patterns. Thus, common themes are grouped and compiled into categories. Therefore, "qualitative research aims to produce explanations rather than simply descriptions", applying complex reasoning from a holistic perspective.

Minayo (2021) explains three stages in the scientific research process for practical purposes: exploratory phase, fieldwork, and data analysis and treatment. The exploratory phase deals with preparation for entry into the field, delimitation of the research object, and definition of the theoretical reference and method, which will be applied in the two subsequent phases. Thus, we delimit the experience of Natura as an experimental model for the application of the LabLei humanization methodology in the corporate environment and define the anthropological approach "participant observation", as advocated by Geertz (2009), supplemented by semi-structured interviews, according to the methodological line of oral history proposed by Meihy and Holanda (2007) for the fieldwork phase. For the third phase, corresponding to data analysis and interpretation, we consider the contributions of Ricouer (2011), who points to the narrative as a mediator of language and action, and Minayo (2020), who ratifies the view of Godoy and Brunstein (2020) that there is no clear boundary between information collection, the start of the analysis process, and interpretation. Additionally, Sass (2019) highlights Dilthey's understanding of the limitations of applying natural science methodologies in human sciences due to their ideals of universality and indubitability characterized by objectivity and impersonality. The work of human sciences should be based on the opposite of this logic, valuing differences and specificities, being fundamentally subjective, and having as its function to explain to man his humanity. With these contributions, we assume hermeneutic phenomenology as the theoretical reference for this phase of the study, using as research material the field notebook records, recordings, and interviews, which were connected and interpreted in search of meaning and correlations in narratives.

3.2.2. Hermeneutic phenomenology

Phenomenology developed from the ideas of the German mathematician Edmund Husserl, who sought a rigorous and systematic method for understanding the world. Boava and Macedo (2020) explain that phenomenology is the search for the meanings of experiences that come to consciousness "using intuition derived from intentional consciousness", thus seeking to "recover the original contact with the object that has been lost in abstract metaphysical speculations or mathematical reductions." Therefore, a phenomenon of consciousness is investigated, inherent in the subject, while the object, outside of consciousness, would concern the transcendent. Complementarily, Logatti (2018) clarifies that phenomenology does not radically distinguish between subject and object; what counts is the intentional connection between the two. Hermeneutics originated in ancient Greece, and the terminology refers to Hermes, the messenger god of mythology. According to Batista-dos-Santos, Cardoso, and Alloufa (2020), hermeneutics was employed to understand classical Greek poetry. Later, it began to be used by Judaism and Christianism to interpret the sacred scriptures and reconstruct the original meaning of the texts. Based on Gadamer, one of the most outstanding representatives of this line of research, Minayo (2014) considers hermeneutics as the art of understanding texts in a broad sense: biography, narrative, document, book, article, etc.

Among the various currents of phenomenology (Boava & Macedo, 2020), hermeneutic phenomenology is an unfolding of Heidegger's ideas (1999) in "Being and Time". It considers that "all human existence is interpretative", being "only possible to understand the phenomenon as it appears in the context and situations in which it occurs." Other currents of phenomenology are realist, constitutive, and existential.

3.3.   3.3 Data collection

Data collection for the study occurred in two stages. In the first stage, using **participant observation** procedures (Geertz, 2009), one researcher took on the role of the observer, while the other acted as the coordinator of the dynamics. The observer noted his impressions of the phenomenon in a notebook. The final stage of the three cycles, corresponding to the "Coexistence history", was recorded via audio, transcribed, and textually organized. Transcription involved the literal transcription of oral recordings into written form, while textualization reorganized the verbal report and corrected grammatical errors to create a more fluent format. In the second stage, after completing the three cycles, the research followed the procedures of **oral life history** proposed by Meihy and Holanda (2007). The researchers conducted ten voluntary interviews that lasted an average of 45 minutes. The interviews were semi-structured, open, and non-directive, encouraging interviewees to share their experiences spontaneously. Initially, the interviews focused on personal and professional history and then shifted to their LabLei experience. The objective was to explore the aesthetic-reflective impact of the intervention by mobilizing the affective, intellectual, and volitional dimensions in personal and professional realms.

Additionally, the researchers analyzed the applicability and effects of the method as a company humanization strategy. The interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed, textually organized, and transcribed again. While transcribing, researchers intervened in the text to incorporate subjective elements such as emotional charge during an interview or emphasis on a particular word or expression. According to the researcher's perception, the transcription method helped approach the observed phenomenon as closely as possible.

The material also includes the results of internal company research conducted with LabLei participants.

3.4.   3.4 Analysis and interpretation

We employed **immersion and crystallization** procedures, advocated by Borkan (1999), to analyze and interpret the collected and recorded data. This method involves an intuitive process of developing insights that emerge during the reading and rereading of narratives and crystallize through the researcher's reflection, producing a phenomenological-hermeneutic interpretation.

3.4.1.   Research

The intervention at Natura took place at the Cajamar unit throughout 2012 and 2013 and initially planned for the implementation of only one LabLei cycle with a group of ten to 15 volunteer managers from various departments, organized in biweekly meetings, held during working hours, in the late afternoon. Due to the success of the first cycle, which had a 100% satisfaction rate (according to internal research conducted by the company's Human Resources department), the company implemented two additional cycles (Table 2).

A total of 38 employees participated, and ten were interviewed, with their responses authorized by the Informed Consent Form. The identity of the interviewees is protected and known only to the researcher. Unifesp Ethics Committee approved the Natura research project: CAAE 31921214.5.0000.5505.

Table 2

LabLei's cycles implemented in Natura

Cycles	Book	Author	Meetings
1	The Death of Ivan Ilyich	Lev Tolstói	6
2	The Dream of a Ridiculous Man	Fiódor Dostoiévski	5
3	The Picture of Dorian Gray	Oscar Wilde	6

4. RESULTS

The process of analysis and interpretation required repeated revisions of the collected material, through the repetitive cross-checking of interview records with stories of coexistence and field notes, until reaching a point of saturation. In this process, we first segmented each participant's narratives into sessions, named with expressions that summarized the main ideas contained therein, such as corporate trends; LabLei benefits; humanistic responsibility; reconnection with the Self and the Other; the richness of shared reading; reflection and pragmatism; literature to expand one's repertoire; humanizing a dehumanized world; literature and real-life mixing; self-transformation; and gains for companies. The next step was confronting the narratives with the stories of coexistence and notes. Through successive reinterpretations of this material, the main themes crystallized, and we reclassified them into categories that we present below, accompanied by selected excerpts from the narratives. It is interesting to note that, based on our experience with the Reading Laboratory in other areas; we already expected some themes to emerge naturally. However, the research revealed new findings very relevant to the corporate environment.

Empathy

Empathy can be understood as the ability "to put oneself in someone else's shoes"; it requires listening and a genuine interest in understanding what the other person thinks and feels. Based on the experience accumulated with the numerous Reading Labs already implemented over the last two decades, this may be the most predictable result of the methodology. In the case of Natura, it was no different, as exemplified below:

> ...the great learning from The Picture of Dorian Gray was this: the possibility of developing greater sensitivity towards how others think and feel, being less pragmatic, all through reading a classic.

The Lab would help Natura sensitize people to this: learning to listen to someone else's opinion, thinking with their head." (Interviewee 1, personal communication, November 14, 2013)

The great insight from the Lab understands other participants' points of view and thinking: 'What did this person see that I didn't?' Then considering that opinion. Through the Lab, I learned to respect other people's points of view. Sometimes, we are confident and don't look at something from other angles. But perceiving Dostoevsky's subtleties made me think: 'I hadn't noticed that.' (Interviewee 6, personal communication, December 5, 2013)

Based on the reports, empathy mobilizes affection and reflection, promoting integration among people, which favors teamwork. Another possible outcome, as elaborated below, is the formation of leadership:

> Management that intends to be more modern and horizontal can significantly benefit from the Lab experience, because it makes you look through the eyes of others, which is essential in a leader's role. (Interviewee 1, personal communication, November 14, 2013)

Reflection and will

LabLei advocates for the aesthetic-reflective effect provoked by the Humanities as a vector for self-reflection and self-knowledge, combined with mobilizing the willpower towards personal transformation. This is a pillar of the methodology, and we identified it through the self-questioning associated with the readings. In the following narrative, the participant refers to the protagonist of one of Tolstoy's stories. Ivan Ilitch is a 19th-century Russian bureaucrat, highly successful in his professional career. However, upon suffering from an incurable disease, he realizes the superficiality with which he led his life and the fragility of his relationships. Reclusive and lonely, he finds comfort and compassion from a servant:

...how am I conducting my life? I have a little bit of Ivan Ilitch, but I don't want to be like that. I want to change. (Interviewee 19, personal communication, December 21, 2012)

Using words such as purpose, mission, and transformation in passages from various narratives revealed a latent need to exercise critical thinking and reflection in the workplace. This exercise benefits both the company and the individual, but the reports suggest that companies, in general, could better take advantage of this demand:

In the Lab, I recognized a great possibility for developing critical thinking, which companies don't do much. I think this training is fundamental for a manager's development and for people's human development. (Interviewee 1, personal communication, November 14, 2013)

This project brings a bit of transparency to the company... it brings a thought that stimulates reflection about life and oneself." (Interviewee 3, personal communication, October 18, 2013)

Affection and gratitude

The mobilization of affection manifests itself in several ways, for example, by using words like love, anguish, and emotion, which are very present in the narratives. The following excerpts from two reports very well summarized this mobilization, provoked by LabLei:

The reading laboratory refers to what I call feeling. (Interviewee 1, personal communication, November 14, 2013)

We need to have love, affection, because we are not machines. (Interviewee 9, personal communication, October 24, 2013)

One aspect of affectivity that deserves highlighting in this study for its consistency is the feeling of gratitude towards the company for the opportunity to participate in LabLei. Some participants referred to LabLei as a **gift** from the company or described the chance as a **privilege**. These reports indicate that the dynamics of LabLei strengthen the emotional bond and engagement of the employee with the company, giving it a differentiated status:

I keep thinking, 'How many companies offer this opportunity to their employees?' Natura didn't have to be the first, but it had to embrace a program like this because it identifies so much with the company's essence. (Interviewee 9, personal communication, October 24, 2013)

Trends and opportunities

The theme of societal change towards valuing sustainability and humanization emerges as an opportunity for companies to gain a competitive advantage, and the following three narratives selected illustrate this idea:

As time goes by, society is changing, and companies are beginning to understand that part of the result comes from people's relationship with work." (Interviewee 1, personal communication, November 14, 2013)

In the future, companies that can bring together people around them who are more generous, humane, concerned about the environment, and more creative will be able to make a great leap forward and differentiate themselves from others. (Interviewee 3, personal communication, October 18, 2013)

To reach a new business level in a world that increasingly demands sustainability, transformation, diversity, and consideration for others, we must move away from the ordinary... The significant reflection needs to come from the individual, not from ready-made recipes, and literature gives us that possibility. (Interviewee 9, personal communication, October 24, 2013)

The support of major international socio-environmental and worker empowerment institutions, including BlackRock, as one of the most significant global investment funds, is already making these trends and opportunities a reality. From the letter to CEOs that its President Larry Fink (2022) publishes annually, we selected the following excerpts from the "A New World of Work" section:

Workers demanding more from their employers is an essential feature of effective capitalism. This drives prosperity and creates a more competitive landscape for professionals, forcing companies to create better and more innovative environments - actions that will help them achieve greater profits for their shareholders. Companies that offer this are reaping the benefits... Companies that do not adapt to this new reality and do not respond to their workers do so at their own risk. Turnover increases expenses, reduces productivity, and harms corporate culture and memory... At BlackRock, we want to understand how this trend affects your sector and company. What are you doing to deepen the bond with your employees? How do you ensure employees from all backgrounds feel safe enough to maximize their creativity, innovation, and productivity? (Fink, 2022).

The BlackRock narrative is quite forceful and connects with the reports we discussed on **affection and gratitude**, supporting the following category we will present.

Humanization and innovation

One of the most interesting findings of the study was the connection between affective attributes, such as trust and relationship, with innovation and creativity, as well as the importance of an intervention outside

the scope of conventional management to trigger the process:

> We don't ask for career advice from people we don't like. We don't even talk much with those people because it's unpleasant. The person we talk to about innovation and ideas is at that same level; there is a lot of personal trust in that relationship since we expose our crazy ideas to someone in that situation. That person doesn't need to be technical, they can even be from another area, but a relationship of trust is necessary. So, these levels of trust are critical for people to exchange ideas that will lead to innovation.

> … Anything that takes people out of this operational mode they live in all the time, this extremely functional and operational "grind" of companies, can elevate them spiritually and take them to another level of humanity, spirituality, and creativity. (Interviewee 3, personal communication, October 18, 2013)

This narrative brings us back to the issue of dehumanization, which we raised in the article's introduction. The "grind" can be interpreted as a reflection of the excessive rationalization of life promoted by modernity, and the way work is organized and managed does not escape this logic. Rationalization, which operates through the standardization and specialization of tasks, acts in the opposite direction to stimulate creativity and, consequently, hinders innovation.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

To assess the potential of the Reading Laboratory methodology as a promoter of humanization in the corporate environment, we analyzed whether the dimensions of **expanding the sphere of existence** were effectively mobilized during each cycle's stages based on the interpretation of the narratives. Indeed, the reports and our observations reveal a dense affective, reflective, and volitional content, grouped into the categories of Empathy; Reflection and Will; Affection; and Gratitude. The emotional involvement witnessed in the testimonials, and the use of words and expressions related to the revision of values, a sense of purpose, and relationship, indicate a genuine motivation of the participants towards personal transformation and human development. We also observed a synergistic interrelation between the categories. Reviewing the material, we realized that the categories reinforce each other. It becomes clear that a common thread permeates all themes, connecting individuals, the company, and society. We interpret that this common thread is human nature, woven by affection, intelligence, and will, supporting Montesquieu's premise of expanding the **sphere of existence** as a solid foundation for thinking about humanization. Thus, we conclude that the Reading Laboratory promotes humanization in the corporate environment through the aesthetic-reflective effect provoked by literature. From this point, a question that arises for discussion is the sustainability of the methodology's results in the long term and its potential reach in the collective context of organizational dynamics as an integral part of the corporate strategy. The design of this study imposed limits on following up with LabLei participants for a more extended period, expanding the experience on a larger scale, and involving the company's Executive Committee in the process. However, we can address this issue through reinterpretation and reflection on the findings. The narratives suggest that an essential step in this direction is understanding humanization as an opportunity for competitive advantage for companies, and we found several elements that support this understanding. In **humanization and innovation**, we found a correlation between affection and creativity, which fosters innovation. In **empathy, and in affection and gratitude**, we found themes that refer to motivation and collaborative attitude, attributes that contribute to talent retention and attraction, especially teamwork. In an increasingly complex world with rapidly changing markets and technologies, the ability to articulate multidisciplinary teams organized by a project is undoubtedly strategic. Collaboration among employees is the foundation of this ability. The narratives also suggest that the formation of humanized leadership would be another important step towards integrating humanization into the corporate strategy. To achieve this goal, we propose incorporating humanistic methodologies as social and human development management practices, thus being absorbed into the companies' organizational culture and, consequently, expanding its scope and continuity in the long term. The engagement of senior leadership in companies is a critical factor for the success of this proposal.

FINAL REMARKS

In addition to competitive advantage, we can explore engagement with the humanization agenda through the corporate responsibility approach. According to Crane et al. (2008), corporations have gradually taken on roles as social and political agents, going beyond their roles as economic agents. A milestone in this trajectory was the debate in the 1970s surrounding the article by Nobel Prize-winning economist Milton Friedman (1970). In this article, Friedman argued that companies' mission should focus on generating value for shareholders (shareholder value theory). Since then, we have seen another line of thought strengthening, which advocates for expanding corporate responsibilities. The concept of stakeholder capitalism, which includes customers, employees, suppliers, and society in general in the list of company objectives, is a translation of this line of thought and is expressed in corporate strategy through philanthropy, corporate social and environmental responsibility, and ESG

(Environment, Sustainability, and Governance). These movements emphasize protecting the environment, community, and governance, but humanization still needs to be adequately addressed. In this vein, there is room for its inclusion based on the Humanities as a dimension of corporate responsibility: a humanistic commitment. We delve deeper into this discussion in "**Humanistic responsibility: a proposal for the ESG agenda**" (2022).

The increasing concern about the worsening of mental health problems strengthens this idea. According to Dejours (2011), the growth of psychopathologies is a global phenomenon. It causes great concern, particularly in countries with the highest environmental, economic, and social development in Europe and North America. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that depression will be the most common disease in 2030, generating economic and social costs for governments due to treatment expenses and lost production (BBC News Brazil, 2009). As we have discussed before, companies are part of this context, burnout is a reality, and the pandemic, environmental disasters, and, unfortunately, the new wars of the 21st century, worsen this scenario even more. Therefore, humanization has never been so necessary, as it sensitizes the dimensions of the sphere of being and contributes to mental health, as confirmed by various studies from the research line "Humanities, Narratives, and Humanization in Healthcare" of CeHFi at Unifesp.

The discussion about the role of companies as agents of humanization through corporate responsibility, health promotion in the workplace, and Humanities-based methodologies, deserves to be deepened in future studies. However, based on the findings of this study, we can already outline some practical contributions for managers of private or public companies. The first is that the LabLei methodology is widely applicable in organizations and can be an element of the ESG social agenda or a tool for mental health promotion programs in the workplace. Another practical application of LabLei is in leadership training and team building. Thus, with this work, we hope to have contributed to opening these paths.

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