

# Exploring representations of business growth and working conditions through the lens of industrial workers

## *Representações do crescimento empresarial e condições de trabalho sob a ótica de trabalhadores industriais*

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### Abstract

The phenomenon of business growth has garnered significant attention due to its role in reflecting the success of organizational practices. Nonetheless, it is imperative to scrutinize this phenomenon critically, acknowledging that comprehensive examination should encompass the diverse agents and influences associated with it. This article seeks to delve into the social perceptions of business growth from the vantage point of industrial workers. We employ qualitative research methods rooted in the analysis of professional trajectories among industrial workers within the metropolitan region of Belo Horizonte, utilizing discourse analysis as our framework. Our primary findings indicate that respondents perceive shifts in their workplace context and the ensuing consequences for their respective companies, prompting decisions to pursue business growth. However, the enunciated discourses exhibit ambiguity as they oscillate between embracing the necessity of adapting to change and opposing the societal impacts of growth on the daily work experience.

**Keywords:** business growth, social representations, industrial workers.

### Resumo

O crescimento empresarial tem sido objeto de atenção uma vez que ampliar os negócios parece evidenciar o sucesso das práticas organizacionais. Todavia, este fenômeno precisa ser examinado considerando que, numa perspectiva crítica, crescer precisa considerar os diversos agentes e influências a ele associado. Neste artigo, o objetivo é analisar as representações sociais do crescimento empresarial sob a ótica de trabalhadores industriais, o que foi feito mediante uma pesquisa qualitativa baseada nas trajetórias profissionais de trabalhadores da indústria da região metropolitana de Belo Horizonte, tratadas por meio de análise do discurso. Os principais resultados sugerem que os entrevistados percebem as alterações no contexto e suas consequências para as empresas, o que resultou na decisão de crescimento empresarial. Todavia, os discursos enunciados são ambíguos, variando da sua adesão à ideia de que nada resta além de se adaptar às mudanças, ao seu combate aos efeitos sociais do crescimento no cotidiano laboral.

**Palavras-chave:** crescimento empresarial, representações sociais, trabalhadores industriais.

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## **1 Introduction**

This article endeavors to examine the social representations of business growth and their interconnectedness with working conditions from the perspective of industrial workers. The proliferation of business organizations has long captivated the attention of scholars, as it ostensibly serves as a testament to the effectiveness of organizational strategies (Stoknes & Rockström, 2018). Business growth is a concept often considered “settled” (Seifert & Vizeu, 2015) as long as actions follow appropriate prescriptions. The success of an organization that effectively plans its activities, organizes its resources to achieve results, guides its professionals to meet goals, and monitors all previous stages is expected, just as management manuals proclaim.

However, beneath this surface, there remain unspoken aspects. The prevailing discourse, by normalizing the notion of progress, tends to sidestep critical considerations encompassing social, political, and working conditions and operates under the assumption that workers will invariably align themselves with the corporate agenda (Seifert & Vizeu, 2015). Indeed, these discourses consider the conflict between capital and labor as resolved, assuming that a widespread adherence to a system they require would be “logical,” as if the reverse were not true. Despite being indispensable actors in organizational dynamics, workers often find themselves relegated to a subordinate position devoid of substantial participation in overarching business decisions (Parker, 2021). This dynamic fosters a mirror game of sorts wherein business owners and their representatives are content with their determinations, while workers grudgingly accept or, in some instances, undermine the established directives, relinquishing the illusion of full control within the organization (Tourish, 2019).

Examining how industrial workers position themselves regarding matters such as business growth serves two crucial purposes. Firstly, it bridges a gap by infusing human dimensions into otherwise mechanistic concepts, acknowledging that these processes inevitably intersect with individual experiences, even if those experiences are often subsumed. Secondly, it reintroduces a political dimension to concepts that have been largely reduced to their functional aspects within much of management literature (Shatil, 2020). This underscores the influential role that representations play in societal life and underscores the necessity of integrating workers, historically marginalized in political discourse, into the fabric of organizations. Through representations rooted in everyday practices, one can understand how work relationships are configured and how different actors position themselves within organizations, as the study of social representations helps to comprehend how a particular phenomenon – in the case of this research, economic growth – acquires meaning and significance among the group of industrial workers. Therefore, it is a potential understanding of how groups and collectives orient themselves, considering such representations as “lenses” or cognitive frameworks that guide everyday practices.

Our research is guided by a perspective that seeks to unearth the contradictions inherent in the construction of socio-economic reality, with an inherent commitment to emancipation and the pursuit of social change (Kilkauer, 2018). Accordingly, this article adopts a critical stance grounded in three pillars: a) historicization of the subject under scrutiny, recognizing the imperative of assessing the concept of business growth within its social and historical context, avoiding universalization and the acritical embrace of pre-existing models; b) discerning contradictions that illuminate power dynamics in socio-organizational processes, with a keen focus on the interplay between different actors in shaping the reality under examination; and c) the aspiration to generate knowledge that can serve as a catalyst for change in addressing potential forms of oppression stemming from the managerialist model in organizational spheres (Paes de Paula, 2015; Faria, 2009).

Additionally, to capture the complexity of our subject matter, we have adopted a multifaceted approach, respecting the contributions and constraints of diverse perspectives while acknowledging the possibility of productive dialogue in favor of a perspective that does not oversimplify the examined aspects. In this regard, we have found the socio-historical perspective embedded in the theory of social representations and French discourse analysis to be pivotal analytical lenses, offering the research valuable tools to interlink the individual worker (the fundamental unit of analysis) and the broader socio-organizational dynamics from which economic growth emanates. Consequently, this article is structured into five sections following this introduction. In the ensuing sections, we will expound upon the theoretical foundation of our work, beginning with a discussion on business growth as conventionally conceived within the management field and the inherent contradictions within this understanding. Subsequently, we will delve into the role of workers and their representations within their professional contexts, illuminating the construction of shared cognitive frameworks that shape the practices of our focal group. To achieve that, it is paramount, therefore, to elucidate the concept of organizational discourses as manifestations of social representations, drawing from Serge Moscovici's Theory of Social Representations (2009) and perspectives in discourse analysis, particularly the French approach, which posits that discourse guides social practices. In this framework, the theory of social representations functions as an explanatory framework for the positions adopted by workers, informed by the interplay between cognition, affect, and action (Jovchelovitch, 1996), thereby delineating potential compliance or resistance to hegemonic managerial discourses. Lastly, we will detail the methodology employed in our research, leading to the presentation of research findings and our concluding remarks.

## **2. Business Growth Beyond the Economic Realm**

Economics often portrays the idea that business inherently gravitates toward growth (Aguilera Castro, 2010). According to this viewpoint, businesses tend to align with economic efficiency, where decisions aimed at maximizing business outcomes are anticipated to be rational, placing economic rationality at the forefront of management priorities (Valeri, 2021). The concept of optimizing results has long dominated management literature, emphasizing techniques and decision-making processes grounded in rationality, with an unwavering focus on achieving maximum economic gain while often sidelining aspects considered subjective, prone to failure, and therefore undesirable, despite existing critiques (Alcaniz, Aguado, & Retolaza, 2020).

Originally rooted in the pursuit of maximizing production, such as Taylor's (1995) principles, business growth processes have grown more complex to meet the demands of capitalism. Challenges arising from the balance between diversification and integration began to supersede simplistic approaches, aiming for continuous positive results. Topics such as mergers and acquisitions (Ireland & Withers, 2021), productive integration (Gehring, 2013), associativism (Pons-Pons & Vilar-Rodríguez, 2019), networks (Ali & Anwar, 2021), internationalization (Grøgaard, Rygh, & Benito, 2019), and technology (Robertson, 2016; Meyer, 2007) now occupy a prominent place on the business agenda.

Likewise, the notion of business growth has become entwined with the broader concept of economic growth, which does not always prioritize the reduction of inequalities (Farias & Teixeira, 2022), leading a managerialist perspective to prevail in administration (Cunha, 2021). Indeed, it is pertinent to distinguish between development and economic growth concerning their effects on collective life. According to Bresser Pereira (2014), economic development necessitates profound structural changes in the economy, culture, politics, and even the organization of the state itself. In contrast, economic growth may not inherently lead to significant transformations, remaining at a superficial level, for example. However, the author

underscores that this distinction bears limited significance, as economic development ultimately hinges on economic growth to facilitate structural changes:

Economic growth can sometimes be unjust and sometimes be offensive to nature; human development, by definition, cannot, because for it to materialize, it is not enough to improve living standards; it is also necessary to see some progress in the other four political objectives that modern societies have defined for themselves. These five objectives are not only incompatible, but they also conflict with each other. This is particularly true of economic development, which in the long term is a necessary condition for achieving the other goals but which in the short term often conflicts with them. This is why *compromising* – the fundamental principle of politics – is always necessary in order to move forward conflicting objectives and interests (Bresser Pereira, 2014, p. 56).

However, within the realm of business logic, we often fail to witness the presence of values that contribute to building a social life through work. Instead, what prevails is the consistent creation and utilization of resources and management tools that prioritize expropriation. Notably, technology emerges prominently in this context due to its capacity to boost production with the same level of input, thereby rationalizing efficiency and productivity growth, which are sufficient justifications for massive technological investment and labor intensification.

Regrettably, this often translates into a labor-saving model that intentionally associates technological intensification with a reduction in the number of employed workers, as discussed by Rezzini, Fraga, and Mori (2019) in a comparative analysis of OECD and South American countries. While it is acknowledged that technology adoption does not directly equate to unemployment, it is imperative to consider that a relationship exists between diminished job opportunities in simple, repetitive roles and the integration of technology. This happens because the objective of growth does not invariably align with the potential for sharing gains with those actively engaged in productive spaces, professional advancement, and comprehensive development. In certain contexts, such as countries undergoing recent industrialization and participation in the global market, conditions arise for structural unemployment characterized by the displacement of jobs due to extensive technological integration. Furthermore, the novel modes of work organization facilitated by technology, such as algorithmic management and other elements characterizing the so-called Industry 4.0, have expedited the precariousness and subjugation of workers in the digital age (Antunes, 2020).

For centuries, workers were predominantly viewed as mere cogs in the machinery of production, relegated to a peripheral role within the business context. They constituted a faceless mass, as processes of production rationalization rendered their individual characteristics, interests, and potentials largely irrelevant. Since they represented only cogs in a large industrial machine, their existence was not entirely dispensable because they formed the bedrock for the functioning of the production processes. Nevertheless, this did not mean that their political significance was overlooked; their collective strength was never disregarded but, rather, concealed. This is exemplified by systematic efforts to undermine and disengage anti-corporate initiatives. From the perspective of businesses, workers' roles were relegated to secondary status, as it was not their prerogative to contribute to projects that did not belong to them, nor were they responsible for conceptualizing or governing these projects, thereby underscoring a process of alienation (Tragtenberg, 2005). However, workers' representations within the business context deserve reconsideration. Through their daily practices, groups of workers serve as pivotal agents in shaping and driving organizational structures and dynamics. As the essential workforce, they constitute the foundation for productive efficiency, thereby ensuring profitability and business growth, as envisioned by administrative models. Yet, how do industrial workers position themselves within this process? How do they construct

representations of their practices and impart meaning, through their labor, to the notion of economic growth? How do cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions interplay within organizations and their established management practices?

### **3. The Worker in the Production Process and the Logic of Economic Growth**

While managerialism champions rationality and its implications in decision-making processes and the production chain as foundational to the concept of economic growth (Gehring, 2013), it is incomplete without examining how productive dynamics arise through the interplay and relationships among various agents in this process. In the context of capitalist labor relations, exchanges occur among distinct agents and social groups, driven by the principles of private property and ownership of the means of production by some, often at the expense of the contribution of productive labor by those lacking such material resources. Throughout history, the justification for this unequal distribution of wealth and assets has evolved based on the values and symbolic elements shaping individual and collective perceptions of reality, bridging both material and symbolic dimensions. However, inherent ambiguities persist within this amalgamation: while the values and ideals propagated by the emerging bourgeoisie in modern times, such as individualism, private property, meritocracy, freedom from state intervention, and individual liberty, appeared to represent fairer and more equitable modes of distributing and accessing resources than in the medieval context, they simultaneously concealed inequalities in terms of the roles and opportunities afforded to different individuals in these new production relationships (Tragtenberg, 2005).

The perspective that individuality and freedom serve as the bedrock for social and economic progress disregards the structural and tangible aspects governing the formation of these relationships. This perspective universalizes the production and economic system based on the abilities and predispositions of individuals, driven by the principle of equality. However, it is crucial to recognize the contradictions within this viewpoint: when essential resources for work, such as income, professional training, and social networks, differ among individuals, the prospects for social and economic advancement cannot be equally accessible to all (Antunes, 2020). Treating all individuals as equals, universal, and rational beings is overly abstract and fails to comprehend the intricate nature of social and economic relations. Conversely, understanding individuals is contingent on the values, economic aspects, and political interests within the symbolic dynamics shaped within each context, for this interplay mobilizes the consciousness and subjectivity of participants from a socio-historical perspective (Gonzalez Rey, 2005). As a consequence of naturalizing this ideological operation, capitalist social dynamics perpetuate the notion that anyone can sell their labor, reinforcing the system based on an “ethic of contribution” to organizational settings that dictate modes of production by converting labor into a commodity.

Aware of the disparities arising from labor relations and the impossibility of achieving social equity, workers have mobilized to assess how management practices impact income distribution and the construction of social reality. They have, through consciousness, sought to exploit contradictions as tools for social change and emancipation. Thus, various perspectives on labor relations are expressed through reflection and critique, underscoring the need to listen to these voices to understand their processes of constructing social reality, including their representations of business growth. In particular, the issue of work motivation has long been a subject of scrutiny. While the dominant perspective leans toward behavioral explanations, authors like Tweedie (2020), grounded in philosophy, argue that motivation is intricately linked to deeper and less apparent aspects of work relationships.

In understanding the formation of human consciousness, the contributions of Vygotsky (1997, 2001) and González Rey (2005) have been significant. They perceive the subject and

their psyche as products and producers of themselves and their reality. The constitution of the subject and their subjectivity is viewed as a dynamic process of internalizing the world and its norms through social interactions, with language serving as the primary conduit between interior and exterior. The more adept individuals are at sharing values and representations, the more effectively they express collective influence in the production of social reality, guided by their interests and intentions. This underscores the potency of social representations in daily practices, critical to understanding the role of workers as agents in the production process and economic growth.

Hence, it is imperative to comprehend the formation of representations associated with the world of business organizations among groups of industrial workers. Social representations can be defined as constructions of meaning (perceptual cues, ideas, images, knowledge) that serve as a reference point for a specific community in its interactions with the world. These representations develop cognitively through processes of anchoring (categorization and association of ideas and meanings with familiar elements within the subjects' reality) and objectification (transforming abstract concepts from thought into tangible, material equivalents), as outlined by Moscovici (2009). Social representations play a fundamental role as categories in micro and macro-social analysis. They, much like Vygotsky's propositions (1991; 2007), facilitate the sharing of content in social interactions while allowing for individual reinterpretations within the broader context that is historically and socially constructed. In this sense, it offers a means to navigate the complexity inherent in labor relations, in contrast to the reductionist perspectives often encountered in managerialist discourse (Shatil, 2020).

To unravel these perceptions, we have adopted discourse analysis as a theoretical-methodological framework to operationalize this study, motivated by its contributions to critical organizational studies and its focus on the ideological dimension's role in shaping the subject and discourse. Discourse analysis is an interdisciplinary field that integrates insights from linguistics, historical materialism, and psychoanalysis (Orlandi, 2015), making it particularly well-suited to the multifaceted nature of the phenomena under examination. In this framework, discourse is understood as a semiotic component of social practice, a systematically organized body of text expressing the meanings and values governing organized collective life, thereby structuring and organizing specific topics, objects, or processes (Fiorin, 2005; Orlandi, 2015).

#### **4. The Role of Discourse in Shaping Social Representations: Dialectical and Dialogical Aspects**

To comprehend the connection between discourse and the formation of social representations among industrial workers, it is paramount to acknowledge that the concept of discourse varies due to the existence of different sociological, psychological, and linguistic intellectual traditions. In a general sense, scholars such as Pêcheux (1990) and Maingueneau (2000, 2005) underscore that discursive productions transcend mere enunciation and linguistic structure; they carry within them ideological and historical elements that regulate interactions among individuals and between different discourses, thus infusing dynamism into social reality. Influenced by Althusser's work (2001), proponents of French discourse analysis emphasize that language and discursive practices materialize ideological traits grounded in the positions held by individual or collective subjects. Consequently, discourse is a relational construct interconnected with and regulated by other discourses, which serve as benchmarks for shaping social practices, including practices that involve domination and the perpetuation of established power dynamics.

Foucault (2014) also significantly contributes to the analysis of how discourses influence the conditions of social production. He highlights that power operates through various discursive mechanisms in social practices. Once institutionalized, these mechanisms establish

a “will to truth,” striving to assert dominance in all practices, effectively exerting a form of coercion over others. Discourse, much like language itself, emerges from a slow and intricate socio-historical process intricately intertwined with power, supervision, and tacit integration. What Foucault (2014, 2017) presents as power operates alongside discourses, either validating or invalidating them, legitimizing or delegitimizing them, following its own rules, classifications, and desires. If it is true that power legitimizes discourse, then it also determines the existence or survival of any “truth” or reality within society. This highlights that control through discourse and power is not a one-way process, but a continuous effort maintained by institutions aiming to govern and exert control over individuals participating in the discourse interplay. Consequently, the discursive landscape tends to gravitate towards institutionalization due to the durability and potency that certain discourses assume in historical and social contexts, exerting a pervasive and coercive influence on various subjects. However, it is important to note that this process is not unilateral, as discourses originate from discursive formations rooted in socialization practices.

In his framework for critical discourse analysis, Fairclough (2001) characterizes discourse as a practice that not only shapes but also transforms reality. From this psychosocial and dialectical standpoint, he asserts that social practices are expressed through discursive formations, enabling both the internalization and perpetuation of institutionalized representations and ideas, as well as the emergence of resistance and alternative agency strategies. These latter strategies emerge through the reinterpretation and reconfiguration of discourses within everyday life, as opposed to a focus solely on the textual aspects present in French discourse analysis. Fairclough emphasizes the need to elucidate the mechanisms of discursive production as social practices. For the purpose of aligning the strands of discourse analysis with the theory of social representations, it is pivotal to recognize that discursive formations serve as reference points for the emergence of representations. These representations encompass linguistic and textual elements, the structural components of discourse, and contextual aspects, incorporating the mechanisms and conditions of discourse production, such as institutionality, the exercise of power, and the embodiment of ideologies within socialization practices.

In line with the theory of social representations proposed by Moscovici (2009), as also discussed by Jodelet (2001, 2005), we posit that discursive practices are foundational to the formation of social representations. According to these authors, social representations serve as symbolic frameworks guiding groups in a collective manner, uniting cognitive schemas (thoughts), affective dimensions (positions and attitudes), and actions (socialization practices) within a historical and contextual context. It is through social representations that groups render meaningful and applicable concepts derived from discourses and institutions. This dynamic process, in turn, underscores the interplay between individuals and societal elements and represents a way of interpreting the world that mobilizes the interaction of various agents within their relationships, including work relations and material production within society.

Moscovici (2009) delineates two mechanisms in the formation of representations. Firstly, anchoring involves the categorization or assimilation of an idea or object into an already established symbolic system, rendering it codifiable and comprehensible. This mechanism entails the process of making the foreign familiar within the group’s logical framework. For example, when studying our current theme, anchoring might involve categorizing the concept of economic growth as something validated and accepted by a group of workers, drawing from the internalization of hegemonic management discourses. In this context, economic growth, as promoted intentionally in managerial discourse, aims to enhance productivity and, subsequently, corporate profitability through efficient techniques. However, within the worker’s context, this notion may be configured as an opportunity for improving material, individual, and/or collective conditions, even if, in practice, this operationalization does not

align with a shared understanding due to capitalistic logic. In the anchoring process, the presence of some degree of naturalization of corporate discourses might be presumed, reflecting mechanisms of ideological action that steer workers toward submission and expropriation as they configure the meaning and categorization of economic growth within their cognitive frameworks.

The second process, objectification, entails concretizing and making a particular idea visible within everyday reality. In the proposed example, workers may objectify the representation of economic growth through the transfer of earnings in the form of wages. This transfer could lead to improved working conditions<sup>1</sup> and greater access to essential resources, services, and other necessities for sustaining life. By combining anchoring and objectification in the formation or representations of economic growth, possibilities for ideological operationalization emerge as the logic of domination through capital reproduction takes shape. However, there also exists the potential for re-signifying and redefining the concept, given the power of agency and the creative and productive capacity of groups in the process of meaning attribution. Ultimately, this interaction between anchoring and objectification leads to the emergence of resistance practices and mobilization for social change, contingent upon the level of criticality that influences the semantic context of the subjects under scrutiny. Thus, understanding the representations of industrial workers regarding economic growth and its impact on work relations, including daily organizational practices and conditions, is essential for gaining a more precise understanding of the socio-organizational dynamics, considering its inherent complexity.

## **5. Methodology**

As previously stated, this study aims to examine the social representations of business growth and their connection to working conditions as perceived by industrial workers. It is important to acknowledge that each individual undergoes unique experiences within their respective professional organizations, which are inherently tied to the subjective realm of personal existence. However, our focus lies on the collective and communal aspects of social representation, transcending specific experiences and contexts. Despite variations in contexts and individualized experiences, there exists a shared and collective dimension among workers who recognize, identify with, and affiliate themselves with one another as a social group. We are delving into an existence that extends beyond being mere employees working at steel mills or automobile manufacturers; instead, we are exploring social existence as workers, a concept not confined to a particular business context. This approach enables us to bridge the narratives of these individuals, as fundamentally, they relate to the same social phenomenon.

Understanding these representations marks the initial stride towards humanizing the organization and acknowledging additional stakeholders beyond entrepreneurs and their representatives. For studies of this nature, qualitative research approaches are highly recommended, given their suitability for delving deeply into multifaceted aspects like those addressed here. Our research adopted an inductive method centered on interviews that revolved around the accounts of workers' professional journeys in their respective work environments. The research settings encompassed industrial companies in the metropolitan region of Belo Horizonte across various sectors, with consideration given to their significance, scale, and workforce size. While we acknowledge the particularities of each context, our pursuit, in line

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<sup>1</sup> The term "working conditions" poses challenges in defining it due to its inherent complexity. As noted by Ramos, Peiró, and Ripoll (2002), this term has been employed in a rather non-specific manner, often adapting to the specific context at hand. In the realm of this study, which encompasses various dimensions such as physical, managerial, and symbolic aspects, it is worth highlighting that the issue of remuneration takes center stage since this particular aspect emerged as predominant in the collected testimonies.



with the objective of capturing social representations linked to the concept of business growth, revolves around shared and common elements inherent in the discursive narratives of each trajectory.

Establishing a context for data production posed a notable challenge. After contacting companies chosen for their representativeness in Belo Horizonte and the surrounding metropolitan area, efforts were made to reach out to workers' unions within these industries to arrange interviews. This approach aimed to broaden the spectrum of potential participants. In cases where direct contact with unions proved unfeasible, we visited factory entrances to establish direct communication with workers and extend invitations to participate in the research, considering the political implications of this type of work and its impact on those involved. Participants were provided with an explanation of the research objectives and the academic aims of the study, which adheres to ethical standards in social research. Consent was obtained voluntarily, and clarification forms were duly completed by all participants. In total, nine (9) workers from four distinct industries, herein simply referred to as Automaker, Metallurgical Co., Steel Mill, and Food Co. industries, were included in the study. These industries are recognized brands with a significant market share in their respective segments, and they have established a significant presence in the region over an extended period.

**Table 1** – Identification of the companies' respective industrial sectors and coding of the respondents

Sector	Coding	Sector	Coding	Sector	Coding
Food Co.	Romeu	Metallurgical Co.	Martinho	Automaker	Sávio
Metallurgical Co.	Laerte	Automaker	Benjamin	Automaker	Joaquim
Metallurgical Co.	Tulio	Automaker	Dario	Steel Mill	Tadeu

Source: Prepared by the authors.

The ideal participant profile was a professional with a minimum of ten years' experience within the companies we approached, who expressed willingness to participate in an interview. We collected personal and professional narratives through individual, in-depth interviews. These interviews adhered to a semi-structured script comprising four key sections: individual career trajectory, company evolution, employees' role in the organization's history, and the organization's future. These sections served as initial prompts, guiding respondents to discuss their personal and professional journeys within the organization. The semi-structured interview script was designed to address gaps in existing corporate history theory, aligning with the core objective of the original research project<sup>2</sup>. It is worth noting that while corporate history is often portrayed as a unidimensional account derived from official documentation, it conceals alternative avenues of social construction (as posited by Berger & Luckmann, 2005). Workers and their memories, shaped by their experiences throughout the organization's existence, are influenced by a range of factors in such a way that their stories are not inherently illegitimate but rendered invisible by the organizational structure (De Decca, 2004).

Of the nine participants, here anonymized with fictional names, seven held positions as union leaders, typically associated with a heightened level of political involvement. While this condition added a unique dimension to our research, it did not limit our analysis. Considering the fact that we reached out to the labor unions, accessing these individuals became more convenient, and they proved to be quite helpful. It is important to note that respondents from

<sup>2</sup> It is crucial to emphasize that the four primary sections of the semi-structured research script were closely aligned with the core objectives of the original research, which centered on the exploration of narratives within the business context. Consequently, it is important to note that the two subsequent subsections of analysis veer into different areas, primarily due to the nature of the cross-sectional data that was amalgamated from the study.

the Metallurgical and Food companies did not have any affiliations with union leaders. The interviews, lasting approximately ninety minutes each, were conducted in person prior to the pandemic, spanning a period of roughly eight months. We opted for locations outside the workplace to ensure participants' comfort and prevent any apprehension they might feel when sharing their experiences. By conducting the research in a non-professional context, we aimed to elicit stories and insights that may have been omitted from the official company history, thus offering a complementary perspective. We emphasized from the outset that these interviews would be strictly used for academic purposes and that the participants' identities would remain confidential, allaying any concerns of potential reprisals.

Each interview was meticulously recorded and transcribed verbatim by a team member who was actively involved in data collection and the broader research project, utilizing a text editor. The corpus generated from the life story narratives was subjected to French discourse analysis, a well-established theoretical and methodological approach that encompasses systematic procedures for identifying and analyzing explicit, implicit, and silenced discourses (Fiorin, 2005). It is worth emphasizing that we departed from the premise that discourses employ numerous strategies of ideological persuasion, which may not be readily apparent upon initial inspection. Depending on the context, we applied techniques, individually or in combination, to identify and analyze: a) the primary aspects of lexical analysis; b) the principal themes and figures (explicit or implicit) in the narratives, including key characters; c) the primary semantic pathways constructed from these themes and figures; d) the major interdiscursive elements; e) the principal elements reflected and refracted in the narratives; f) the key aspects of discourse production conditions; g) the primary discourses present in the text; h) the principal ideological elements advanced in these discourses; i) the primary ideological elements challenged within these discourses; and j) the position of the hegemonic discourse in each text concerning the dominant discourses in the society in which they are situated.

Crucially, in terms of theoretical and methodological alignment, we endeavored, through discourse analysis at the textual and linguistic levels, to identify elements that could shed light on the contexts in which discursive formations and social representations were produced with respect to anchoring and objectification. Consequently, we did not disregard the socio-historical and dialectical dimensions of discursive and social practices. During the analysis of interviews, two resources were heavily utilized. Firstly, in the discursive excerpts, we underlined passages signifying material that warranted further examination. Secondly, quotation marks may have been employed to highlight and emphasize expressions used by respondents, as these were particularly amenable to the techniques described. Among the limitations of our study, we acknowledge that participants tended to focus more on present or hypothetical scenarios than on the past. However, we recognize that any research involving individual memories and their intersection with collective aspects inherently encounters tensions and limitations. We contend that one of the research's methodological strengths lies in its contribution to an evolving trend in historical studies, one that seeks new sources and values new historical actors. Additionally, our investigation contributes to the development of fresh narratives on previously explored subjects, as we will discuss in the subsequent section.

## **6. Analysis and Discussion of Empirical Findings**

In our examination of the empirical data, we have delineated two fundamental discursive categories, namely a) contextual shifts and their impacts on companies and b) business growth. We will delve into each of these categories in the subsequent subsections.

### **6.1 Shifts in Context and Their Impacts on Companies**

Within our discourse analysis, we initially identified a discourse centered on the transformation of contextual factors and their repercussions on organizations. This discourse encompasses two key semantic trajectories, namely a) the impact of contextual shifts on organizations and b) the lack of political awareness among workers. The stance assumed by Tadeu, an employee at the Steel Mill, in regard to the company's circumstances, is intrinsically rooted in historical contextuality. It is a product of his keen observation of the organization's recent trajectory within its unique contextual setting. In the discourse fragment (001), he critically assesses the ramifications of changes in government within the country and their direct consequences on the organization:

(001) Well... I don't think I can answer that because we, who are working with the maintenance department... It's not that we're not politically aware. But we're not really all that engaged. You see, us folks in maintenance, we've sort of become somewhat distant from all the politics, you know? For me personally, I'd say it didn't really matter who was in charge... Be it the president or anyone else. It's not our main concern, you know? How can I put this? We're usually too swamped with our tasks, and so these changes don't carry a lot of weight with us, you know? I do have political views, and I consider myself an activist, you know? I mean... However... I tend to keep things separate, you know? It's a bit like... In general, I think that during the last few governments in Brazil, whether it was during Lula's or Dilma's tenures when it comes to us as workers, our work, and the financial aspects of our class, I didn't really see any major changes. Now, if you look at it from a broader perspective, in terms of "Brazil" as a whole, you can see that social classes have been changing, right? New social classes emerged. We believe that, with the increase in trade, the lives of many people have improved. But honestly, I don't see much of a direct impact on us, the ones who work here.

The characters featured in discourse (001) include explicit references to industrial workers in the maintenance sector, former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, and President Dilma Rousseff (referred to here as metonyms representing their respective presidential terms, and implicit ones to the enunciator himself. Tadeu assumes a self-critical position in relation to his fellow workers within the maintenance sector, asserting that the nature of their work, characterized by its demanding workload and rapid pace, has rendered them somewhat apathetic to the country's political landscape ("we, who are working with the maintenance department [...] we're usually too swamped with our tasks"). By including himself within the plural subject pronoun "we," the enunciator metonymically conveys the prevailing political disinterest among professionals in his category, ostensibly driven by the demands of their work. However, in a subsequent segment, the enunciator shifts to the first person singular, explicitly indicating that he differs from his colleagues. He claims to possess "political views" and identifies as "an activist." Despite this, he confesses that he has not discerned substantial improvements for workers, even though he acknowledges the broader societal benefits stemming from the presidencies mentioned. In examining this discourse, it becomes evident that, concerning the construction of social representations (Moscovici, 2009), the concept of activism does not arise collectively but rather through individual and sporadic expressions of workers who aspire to ignite political awareness among their peers. This implies that politicization hinges on initiators who catalyze reflective processes within the group, and objectifying this idea would necessitate a higher level of class mobilization. Among the benefits, Tadeu also highlights the emergence of new social classes, implicitly suggesting economic progress and enhanced purchasing power for the C and D classes, along with increased trade, indicative of an improved quality of life for many.

A second theme discernible in this passage is the lack of political awareness among workers, seemingly attributable to their working conditions, which strongly conform to a prevailing social representation that breeds political indifference. Consequently, Tadeu

expresses consistent reservations when discussing the country's politics, hinting at his limited awareness of its details. This lack of awareness is closely tied to the specific configuration of labor, which separates industrial workers from concerns beyond their immediate production context. Indeed, this aligns with the findings of Thompson, Warhurst, and Callaghan (2001) and essentially portrays workers as the weakest links in the chain. Their ignorance, borne out of the constraints of their work, distances them from comprehending the broader world around them. This interplay between knowledge and skills germane to immediate work, while not irrelevant, is portrayed as limiting their engagement with other facets of social life.

Interdiscursivity is also apparent at two additional levels: firstly, by distinguishing between “us,” the maintenance workers alienated by our work, and “me,” an activist attuned to the nation's political trajectory, the enunciator positions himself apart from his peers, granting him the ability to express particular opinions, such as those pertaining to recent economic developments within the country, particularly their impact on the company. Secondly, the respondent's analysis segregates the overarching benefits realized by the broader population during the last two administrations from a perception of comparatively fewer advancements among steelworkers. An implicit assumption emerges, suggesting that the mentioned governments primarily sought to include previously marginalized individuals in the consumption-oriented aspects of society, thus explaining why the benefits were not perceived with the same magnitude within groups already socially and economically integrated, such as steelworkers.

In discourse fragment (002), Joaquim delves into the transformations, particularly in terms of growth, that the company underwent between the FHC and Lula administrations.

(002) During the Fernando Henrique government, the company operated hesitantly. They'd produce something today, but in three to six months, they'd already be contemplating whether to continue production or not, you know? It's like I'm telling you: you could see that, you know? You could see the numbers inside the workshop. Nowadays, it's a different story. With Lula, things took a turn for the better. When I first joined the body shop, it was just a tiny space. But now, it's expanded significantly, occupying, I'd say, around 40 to 50% of the presses. And all of this progress occurred during the Lula administration, you know? The company grew, and they hired a lot more people. So, during Lula's tenure, the market really opened up for the Automaker.

This testimony introduces two significant figures in Brazilian politics, Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Lula, who serve as metonyms representing distinct eras in the nation's history. Specifically, Fernando Henrique Cardoso's two terms in office, spanning from 1995 to 2002, and Lula's presidency from 2003 to 2010 symbolize these respective periods. Under the governance of the former, characterized by “hesitant” decision-making, the company operated from what can be described as a “tiny” space. However, during Lula's tenure, the Automaker underwent a remarkable transformation, evolving into a substantial and rapidly expanding enterprise. Implicitly, the company's growth, paralleled with the notion that “the market really opened up for the automaker,” reflects broader economic and social advancements within the country. This profound leap that Joaquim recounts is intricately linked to the prevailing economic context, a connection aligned with the arguments articulated by Biancarelli (2014).

## **6.2 Business Growth**

Turning our focus to the second analysis category, which centers on the growth of the organization, the testimonies chronicle the company's progression, irrespective of the prevailing circumstances. This category encompasses the following semantic avenues: a) the company's economic expansion and b) the workers' perception of this process. Within the first

semantic path, the company's expansion takes on a personified form, with certain company directors assuming a pivotal role in driving the organization's growth. This trajectory is rooted in two overarching themes: a) the attribution of responsibility for the company's growth and b) the process of worker reification as a means to deify managers.

(003) During Mr. Corrêa's<sup>3</sup>tenure, the company wasn't doing that great, you know? But after his passing, it began to expand under José Luís<sup>4</sup> ... He introduced a fresh management style for the company. He drove its growth. He was the one who did it, alongside... Anyway, he was the mastermind behind it, you know? He spurred such intense growth that... It's not just limited to this... How long has Corrêa...? He passed away many years ago. I can't recall exactly when [he passed]. I can't remember. The exact date escapes me... But it was after his time that things really started to take off. I mean... It began during his time, you know? Under his stewardship. But after he was no longer with us, it really took off, thanks to João's leadership. He's quite adept in this area. Very sharp indeed.

The attribution of the company's growth, according to the enunciator, is ascribed to the individual actions of specific managers, with particular emphasis on the figures of "Corrêa" and "José Luís." The choice of vocabulary aligns the industry's expansion predominantly with José Luís, as evident in the phrase, "It began to expand under Jose Luís... He introduced a fresh management style for the company". The respondent repeatedly underscores José Luís's instrumental role, employing deliberate repetition to emphasize certain ideas: "He drove its growth. He was the one who did it [emphasis added], along with... Anyway, he was the mastermind behind it, you know? He spurred such intense growth that... It's not just limited to this... it really took off, thanks to João's leadership. He's quite adept in this area. Very sharp indeed." Romeu attempts to introduce flexibility by mentioning that Mr. José Luís contributed to the growth "alongside" others but then pivots back to José Luís. While he does mention Mr. Corrêa, it's merely to underscore the weight of Mr. José Luís, his successor: "But it was after his [Corrêa's] time that things really started to take off. I mean. It began during his time, you know? Under his stewardship. But after he was no longer with us...".

One notable character invoked in fragment (003) is the manager who has left a lasting impression on the employees, clearly reflected in Romeu's frequent references to Mr. José Luís. An implicit theme underlying this figure is the uncertainty surrounding who truly deserves credit for a company's growth: the management or the workforce. Within this testimony, we observe a worker associating growth primarily with a manager. This could stem from a genuine connection with the leader, possibly due to their charismatic persona or their capacity to enhance both the company and the working conditions for industrial laborers. Regardless, this discourse presupposes that management unilaterally holds responsibility for the company's success, with workers cast in a subsidiary role, reified to elevate the status of the managers (Aktouf, 2000). This perspective aligns with the prevailing hegemonic discourse in Brazilian society, which places greater value on intellectual labor over manual work. Consequently, it leads to the conclusion that a company's growth owes more to the "genius" of its planners than to the (secondary) efforts of its workers.

The second semantic path within this category encompasses the following themes: a) worker exploitation, b) disillusionment experienced by new employees who join the company due to misrepresentation in "propaganda," c) the sentiment of nostalgia for perceiving the company as better in the past than the present:

(004) All I know is that the company has grown a lot, you know? Such an amazing growth, really. However, like every company, it has its rights and wrongs, right?

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<sup>3</sup> Fictitious name.

<sup>4</sup> Fictitious name.

Particularly when it comes to salaries... The company is great, truly great. It's impossible to deny its merits... But what takes the shine off it is the salary issue... You can't criticize the entire company. The salary is the heart of the issue... It put an end to [inaudible]. It has a reputation... It has a name, right? It's held onto its reputation.

The central figure, recurrently personified to the point of assuming a character-like presence, is the company itself. This company boasts a stellar reputation and has undergone substantial growth; however, this has come at the expense of meager wages for its workforce. We observe the evident frustration of a worker who, despite laboring for a prestigious company, grapples with a paltry income. Within this passage, the vocabulary employed underscores the extent of the company's expansion while concurrently, interdiscursively, accentuating its vulnerabilities. Even amid commendations for the company, the enunciator interjects elements of skepticism, as evidenced by lexical choices such as "right," "amazing," "wrongs," and "really." Consequently, this praise is pervaded by latent criticism, all invariably linked to remuneration. Indeed, Romeu's persistent assertion regarding the food company's strong standing in the market linguistically underscores its significance. However, it also reflects the respondent's attempt to convince himself that these recent years have held value despite the glaring exploitation, leading to a sense of disillusionment. At the Steel Mill, interns are left disheartened upon joining the company, a sentiment connected to the overly exaggerated manner in which the company presents itself in its advertising campaigns.

(005) [...] There's an enormous demand from people eager to join the steel group. You see, just like any sizable company, it carries a certain reputation, boasts cutting-edge technology, and everyone aspires to be part of it... Whether as a trainee or a full-time worker. However... I must say, once you're on the inside, it might not match your initial expectations. When I first came aboard, although it didn't possess the modernity it has now, it wasn't quite as hyped either. I believe those who joined back then faced fewer disappointments. Nowadays, I think those who come on board... may experience even greater disillusionment. Because the company heavily relies on advertising, and I've witnessed former trainees who decided to leave... They had dual aims: to grow during their trainee program, you know? To learn new stuff and all that. And secondly, to remain with the company. However, many of them revealed that they didn't wish to stay because they found out that the company didn't quite live up to its claims. The workplace is decent, but it's quite restrictive.

Within this account, we can discern the personas of the intern and the worker, who, despite their initial attraction to the company's promises of prosperity, frequently find themselves disillusioned. The respondent employs lexical choices that underscore an interdiscursive gap between anticipation and actuality. On the one hand, he utilizes vocabulary that hints at fresh opportunities and outlooks: "a sizable company, boasting cutting-edge technology;" "the company heavily relies on advertising"; "to develop during their trainee program, you know? To learn new stuff and all that." Conversely, he deploys terms that puncture the initial aspirations: "Once you're on the inside, it might not match your initial expectations;" "These days, newcomers may experience even greater disillusionment" "they found out that the company didn't quite live up to its claims." These word choices allude to the multifaceted role that the company plays, not only in the eyes of its workforce and the neighboring community but also among university students aspiring to enhance their prospects through internships and trainee programs. The respondent insinuates that disillusionment with work has historically been a prevailing representation at the Steel Mill, although it appears to have intensified lately—an implicit presumption linked to the company's growing promotional efforts over time.

Another recurring theme in fragment (005) – also evident in other discursive fragments—is that of nostalgia: the belief that the company was a more favorable workplace in

the past. However, in Tadeu's case, we encounter an even bleaker outlook, as he contends that working for the company had already been a source of disappointment a few years ago – a situation that has only exacerbated since. When he discursively contemplates the company's size, prestige, and access to significant technological resources, he simultaneously underscores his critical stance concerning the dearth of opportunities. This stems from the organization's failure to provide improved working conditions for both its employees and trainees. This, in turn, affects their engagement, aligning with the findings of Tsourvakas and Yfantidou (2018).

Sávio, an employee at the Automaker, has examined the company's growth, emphasizing the benefits it has generated for the community and its workforce:

(006) The company has grown much bigger, you know? It's evolved, it's improved the quality of the product it markets, and all that has reverberated out there, you know? There's been an upswing in job opportunities because sales have surged... In the past, there used to be a saying that when an auto worker walked into a store and displayed the company's functional layout, everyone wanted to shake his hand. But it's no longer the case [laughs]. It's precisely what I was telling you—there's been a significant decline. It may sound peculiar, and I don't claim to be an expert, but there were assembly line operators in the past who earned up to six times the minimum wage... So, as the company expands, the region prospers as well, attracting new investments, just as we witness today. Ultimately, that will benefit all the employees, won't it? It safeguards job positions because the product has seen improvement and growth... [It's] a well-established product in the market, so... This not only provides job security for the employees but also bolsters the town's overall stability, you know?

According to fragment (006), the company's growth exerts a positive influence on both its employees and the adjacent community. This is evident in the lexical choices like "it's improved the quality of the product it markets, and all that has reverberated out there," "as the company expands, the region prospers as well, attracting new investments, just as we witness today. Ultimately, that will benefit all the employees," and "This not only provides job security for the employees but also bolsters the town's overall stability?" In this narrative, the company emerges as a force for enhancing the well-being of everyone while simultaneously echoing the sentiment of nostalgia for a time when working conditions were superior, both in terms of income and professional recognition for the employees. This nostalgia mirrors the prevailing zeitgeist, as posited by Gandini (2020).

Implicit in this discourse is the notion of a disconnection between the company's growth and the actual benefits reaped by its workers and the broader community. On the one hand, Sávio asserts that "the company has grown much bigger," anchoring the concept of growth as advantageous for both the community and the industrial workforce. However, on the other hand, he reminisces about a time when working in the assembly plant evoked admiration from society, alongside the prospect of earning a substantial income. In this regard, the objectification of this idea remains unfulfilled in terms of societal practices, signifying an inherent contradiction guiding the worker's perspective. While growth is categorized as a potential avenue leading to mutual gains, there exists a void in terms of its actualization within societal practices. This interdiscursive relationship underscores the paradox between the company's growth and the diminishing wages and prestige of the workers—an archetype of private appropriation, where a select few accrue surplus without significant contributions from the majority.

## 7. Discussion

The examination of the discursive fragments presented in the analysis section highlights at least two noteworthy elements warranting in-depth discussion. Firstly, there exists a conspicuous construction of a social representation where companies are perceived as *loci* of

production opportunities, provision, and avenues for personal and professional satisfaction. These factors are perceived as pivotal, as without them, an individual's material existence remains ineffective. In this context, labor relations are intrinsically linked to employability since the productive capacity is contingent on a business environment that facilitates the construction of economic and social reality through the availability of production resources. Essentially, respondents seem to objectively represent companies and their associated labor relationships as elements that give substance to their lives. It is as though there were an implicit understanding that without this economic and symbolic universe, a sizable portion of their lives would cease to exist.

While this representation is undoubtedly grounded in materiality, it also possesses a symbolic dimension that normalizes a somewhat "subservient" attitude towards the *modus operandi* of companies, particularly concerning their pursuit of business growth (Antunes, 2020). This implies a predisposition to accept the inevitability of growth for companies, along with the notion that the onus of adaptation falls squarely on the shoulders of the workers, irrespective of the associated costs – whatever they may be. This is a curious phenomenon, particularly among respondents whose profiles are predominantly that of trade unionists. An underlying assumption that emerges is that the historical context of the workers' movement, characterized by a weakened legal and institutional environment and widespread job insecurity, may be steering them toward a strategy of damage control. In this context, having a job and acquiescing to unfavorable conditions may be viewed as preferable to being unemployed.

Secondly, this notion is universalized beyond the specific contexts covered and exemplifies the pervasive influence of discourses originating in administrative sciences. These discourses are absorbed and perpetuated by both managers and workers, culminating in the form of a social representation of economic growth. Through the compelling nature of this representation, a narrative is established wherein the power of the worker to effect change is dwarfed in comparison to that of companies as if these companies existed independently of the concrete individuals who structure and make them dynamic. This reasoning appears to rationalize workers' acceptance of industrial-organizational structures and working conditions despite their underlying discontent and dissatisfaction with the prospects offered by business growth. In the interplay between cognition, emotion, and action – the foundational elements of social representations, according to Moscovici (2009), Jodelet (2001, 2005), and Jovchelovitch (1996) – we discern the acceptance and normalization of corporate practices by workers, even when these practices fail to meet their expectations, and they feel powerless to change the situation. Growth is deemed inevitable, yet not everyone reaps the rewards.

From a political standpoint, this situation is profoundly intricate, given the influential role of social representations in galvanizing groups of industrial workers for social transformation. Based on the accounts gathered here and analyzed through a textual lens, it is inadvisable to dismiss the contextual influences on how these discursive practices are shaped. These contextual factors have a direct bearing on how workers, whether individually or collectively, position themselves in the face of changes that could potentially benefit them. This raises questions about the effectiveness of the idea of economic development, as proposed by Bresser Ferreira (2014), beyond a conceived idea of growth. It is worth considering the extent to which the context in which these discursive practices take shape hinges on the creation and institutionalization of these discourses. Consequently, it becomes essential to emphasize the ethical and political commitment of administrative sciences in terms of how they analyze and steer work practices in organizational settings. To what degree have the managerial discourses advocated by this field of knowledge prompted reflections on their consequences and how these discourses have proliferated? We must emphasize that this encompasses both academic facets – pertaining to the generation of knowledge and techniques shared in the training of administrators – and the daily practices established within organizational spaces.



## 8. Final Remarks

This article delves into the social representations of business growth and its intersection with working conditions as perceived by industrial workers. To accomplish this, we conducted a qualitative investigation grounded in narratives detailing the career trajectories of workers within their work environments. The analysis of the collected material was undertaken through the framework of French discourse analysis, which yielded ambivalent discursive categories. On one hand, the respondents see themselves as undervalued and underpaid in relation to their contributions to the business. However, they express a sense of “depoliticization,” which renders them unable to mount organized resistance. As a result, they reluctantly accept progressively deteriorating working conditions. On the other hand, they perceive business growth as an inexorable force within the companies they work for, given the prevailing economic landscape characterized by competition. They attribute this expansion primarily to the competence of managers while minimizing their own role in the process.

The primary contributions of this study align with the imperative need to critically scrutinize the concept of business growth. Firstly, business growth is not an inherently obligatory phenomenon that companies must unconditionally pursue. It necessitates “a rupture with the presumption of the naturalization of growth as the paramount objective of organizational activity” (Seifert & Vizeu, 2015, p. 137). This challenges the fallacy of capitalism’s inexorability and rejects the unequal and exploitative expansion driven by economic interests that accumulate profits at the expense of worker dignity. Conceiving business growth as inevitable and the inevitable outcome of a technical and economic formula frames this phenomenon as rational and precise, contrasting it with the imprecise and limited nature ascribed to workers. This binary thinking underscores the labor and management conflict, as argued by Aktouf (2000).

Regarding the second contribution, it is erroneous to conclude that the respondents lack awareness of their identities and roles within the production context. Their perceived insignificance in their discourse stems primarily from a history of unfavorable clashes, including deliberate technological choices aimed at reducing labor needs, perpetuating the constant specter of unemployment. Mobilization strategies are devised not only to secure adherence to the corporate agenda but also to persuade individuals that only the knowledge held by business leaders and their representatives holds value. Furthermore, there exists an asymmetry in the distribution of outcomes, with compensation often being kept low, reinforcing submission as a prerequisite for survival. The outcome is the perpetuation of a social representation in which the company assumes an immense and indispensable role while the worker is portrayed as insignificant and dispensable, even though they are integral to the organization. Indeed, this symbolic detachment serves a unilateral and ostensibly autonomous corporate narrative in alignment with movements that seek to relegate workers to a dispensable status within the organizational dynamic.

In this context, it is unsurprising that business growth is presented as an inevitable notion, something every enterprise would naturally pursue if not for the “human factor” (Dejours, 2007) standing in the way. This perspective oversimplifies the intricate nature of outcomes within organizations and places the blame squarely on workers in the event of any failure to meet corporate objectives. Potential research agendas in this direction could encompass: a) the exploration of “unofficial” voices within organizations that also contribute to the construction of corporate history, albeit occupying a peripheral space in the official narrative; b) a critical examination of the discursive construction of “official” corporate history; c) the identification of gaps and silences within official corporate narratives; d) an analysis of official corporate documents juxtaposed with the historical context in which they were produced, among other studies that underscore the relevance of the theme of economic growth

in humanizing organizational practices. Despite ongoing calls to recognize employees as indispensable components of businesses, this research reveals that workers continue to propagate a conception that portrays corporations as self-sustaining entities capable of success even in the absence of industrial workers who are reduced to mere human “resources.” This contradiction stems from the divide between the realms of economy and society, perpetuating and exacerbating severe imbalances within the organizational context.

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