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# SEMEAR Project: Planting Seeds for a Better and More Virtuous World

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# SEMEAR Project: Planting Seeds for a Better and More Virtuous World

## **Abstract**

This capstone presents the SEMEAR project. The SEMEAR project is the main initiative of the Brazilian Coaching Society Foundation. The project aims to stimulate and support flourishing in Brazil through positive coaching programs in three major areas: social, educational, and corporative. A set of interventions designed to enhance well-being, facilitate healthy relationships, promote flow and engagement, stimulate social contribution, as well as other aspects that can help people flourish, will be proposed. The project will explore how to use coaching, positive psychology and philanthropy to develop virtues, promote human flourishing and generate people's well-being in families, schools, companies and communities through change agents such as coaches, parents, educators and leaders. Therefore, the project plans to engage and prepare 1,000,000 positive coaches who will directly or indirectly impact 50,000,000 people by 2050, contributing to the flourishing of 25% of the Brazilian population.

## **Keywords**

Positive psychology, flourishing, philanthropy, well-being, social contribution

## **Disciplines**

Other Psychology

Running head: SEMEAR PROJECT

SEMEAR Project: Planting Seeds for a Better and More Virtuous World

Flora Regina da Silva

University of Pennsylvania

A Capstone Project Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Applied Positive Psychology

Advisor: Isaac Prilleltensky

August 1, 2015

SEMEAR Project: Planting Seeds for a Better and More Virtuous World

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Master of Applied Positive Psychology  
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August 1, 2015

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### **Introduction: The First Step: A Dream, an Indignation**

The SBCoaching Foundation was established with a dream: the dream of making Brazil a better country in which we can be better children, better parents, better students, better educators, better citizens and better rulers. In other words, a country where people can flourish – which, according to Keyes (2002), means being filled with positive emotions and functioning well, psychologically and socially. Or, as stated by Seligman (2011), that people can have access to the building blocks of a flourishing life: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment (PERMA). It was with this goal in mind that I developed the structural and programmatic elements of the SEMEAR project, the program that contains the theoretical grounding and the set of interventions that will guide the activities of the Foundation, which was created to stimulate and support flourishing in three major areas (social, educational and corporate).

The core values that will guide the project are excellence and competence; citizenship and cooperation; innovation and distinction; seriousness and ethics; growth and wisdom; contribution and respect. These are also the values of my company. I believe that they are fully aligned with the proposal of this capstone, to the extent that they prioritize a series of essential aspects for the flourishing of individuals and communities.

Values may be referred to as “benefits that human beings provide to other individuals and communities” (Prilleltensky, 1997, p. 520). In this sense, they function as ideas or propensities to action that can cultivate a flourishing life and a good society (Prilleltensky, 1997). It stands to reason that by adopting the aforementioned values, we do not intend to assume authoritarian and dogmatic moral frameworks (see Prilleltensky, 1997), but rather validate guiding principles to drive our actions so as to offer meaningful and prolific contributions. Therefore, with those values in mind we shall put into practice the actions proposed by the SEMEAR project.

In this capstone, I shall present the architecture, scope and functionality of SEMEAR, as well as the context in which it originated. First, therefore, I shall return to the initial proposition to discuss the dream on which the purpose of promoting flourishing in Brazil came to light.

In 2012, we launched the first positive coaching training course in the country, integrating our coaching practice and methodology with positive psychology concepts, theories and interventions. As part of their positive coaching training, the students were asked to implement a positive coaching program in a real community to increase flourishing and well-being. The results they described exceeded all expectations. On one occasion, a positive coach told me that, during the three months he and his colleagues were implementing the program in a favela – Brazilian shantytowns plagued by violence and social neglect – the local crime rate dropped considerably. This and many other encouraging testimonies led us to consider how we could amplify the flourishing opportunities the program was creating. Expanding these benefits to a wider public would require a well-defined structure and a solid support, provided by an institution devoted to promoting flourishing among the Brazilian population. It was then that my husband and partner, Villela da Matta, and I decided we would create such an institution. Other factors also caused our resolve to strengthen over time. Since we launched the first positive coaching training course in the country, Brazilians have seen their expectations of a better future for Brazil shattered by the current economic crisis – growth in GDP (Gross Domestic Product), which stood at 1.8% in 2012, fell to 0.1% in 2014 (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística [IBGE], 2015). However, the country is also in the throes of a moral crisis, illustrated by a number of shocking financial scandals – from March 2014 to May 2015, more than 110 people have been accused of corruption, money laundering and other financial crimes in an investigation involving the country's largest oil company (Smith, Valle, & Schmidt, 2015). Another scandal, which has been

dragging on since 2012, involves accusations of bribery, money laundering and misuse of public funds against dozens of politicians – including several congressmen. Many of them have been prosecuted, but now the accusations continue against politicians from other political parties (Kattah, 2015). Altogether, the cost of corruption in Brazil has been estimated at between 1.38% to 2.3% of the country's total GDP (Federação das Indústrias do Estado de São Paulo [Fiesp], 2010).

All this is already having an effect on the well-being of Brazilians. According to Keyes (2002), individuals function well when they see society as meaningful and having the potential for growth, when they feel a sense of belonging and acceptance in their communities and when they find themselves contributing to society. However, a survey conducted by the National Confederation of Industry (Confederação Nacional da Indústria [CNI], 2014), which interviewed 2,002 Brazilians from 143 municipalities, revealed that 62% of Brazilians have little or no trust in people, whereas 82% believe that people are willing to bend the rules to get what they want – the so-called “Brazilian way”. This lack of trust in the very society in which one lives is not the only disturbing sign that some fundamental aspects of the well-being of Brazilians may be in jeopardy. The mental health of the inhabitants of the city of São Paulo, which represents a microcosm of Brazilian society and is also where the Foundation will be based, is not doing well. The São Paulo Megacity Mental Health Survey (SPMHS), the Brazilian segment of the World Mental Health (WMH) Survey Initiative, conducted under the auspices of the World Health Organization, revealed that about one in ten São Paulo residents has recently had an active severe mental disorder, especially anxiety and mood disorders (Andrade et al., 2012). It is also worth mentioning that, according to Diener and Diener (2011), corruption and crime lower the quality of life in societies and are associated with poorer health and lower subjective well-being.



As such, we have moved from the dream of making Brazil flourish to the indignation with the barriers that stand in the way of this flourishing. The perception that prevails among Brazilians is that corruption and lack of ethics and character occur at all levels, permeating and negatively influencing every citizen and corroding their well-being. The country's rulers often do not understand their role to serve society, to promote well-being and to plan, organize and implement measures that guarantee human development. Leaders often do not understand their role to maximize resources and generate solutions, while promoting opportunities so their followers can use their knowledge and skills to their full potential, offering conditions for individuals and teams to flourish and develop in the workplace. Parents often do not know how to fulfill their role as an educator, friend, counselor and leader, and as an example of citizenship and virtue, offering their children the conditions to develop their full potential. Educators frequently do not have access to the knowledge and practices to empower human beings in their development and help them mature into citizens of the world. As a consequence, we have children and adolescents who are unaware of their strengths and virtues and who have no sense of citizenship. The lack of growth and contribution at all levels of the strata of society permeate our current moment in history. The lack of character and virtue can be seen in people's conduct and interactions in all areas of life. The indignation in the face of all this strengthens the desire for change and increases the relevance of the SEMEAR Project.

### **Part I: From the Problem to the Solution**

After a more systematic analysis of the current Brazilian context, the following characteristics stand out:

- A country with weak or non-existent development. With respect to GDP for 2015, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is forecasting a contraction of around 1%. The IMF also estimates that only nine countries will report a worse economic performance than

Brazil (Trevizan, 2015), which has already slipped from sixth to seventh place in the ranking of the world's largest economies (Tuon, 2013). However, while Brazil may stand in seventh place in economic terms, the figures on the well-being and development of its people leave a lot to be desired. Brazil's Human Development Index (HDI) – measured by criteria such as life expectancy and health, education and income per capita – is 0.744, which puts the country in 79th place on a ranking of 187 nations (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2014).

- Unproductive and uncompetitive companies. A Brazilian worker, on average, produces a quarter of what an American worker does, which can be attributed to human capital deficiencies and productive inefficiency (Ferreira, 2015). Total factor productivity, which gauges the efficiency with which both capital and labor are used, is lower now in Brazil than it was in 1960 – which means that, in more than 50 years, nothing effectively has been done to improve the productivity of workers and Brazilian companies. To make matters worse, many Brazilian companies are unproductive because they are poorly managed. John van Reenen, of the London School of Economics, said in an interview with *The Economist* (2014) that although its best firms are just as well run as top-notch American and European ones, Brazil has many highly inefficient companies. This problem is directly linked to another: the poor quality of education in Brazil, which also affects professional training and performance. A study called *Functional Literacy Numbers in Brazil – Potential Losses for Industries* (Vieira, Kovaleski, & De Francisco, 2006), argues that functional illiteracy can be harmful to industries, since it causes material losses through rework, lack of achievement in training and misunderstandings of tasks. The study also found that only 26% of the Brazilian population is considered functionally literate.

- Depressed, stressed and disengaged citizens. Research by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 18 countries placed Brazil in first place in terms of depression: 10.4% of the Brazilian population had experienced a major depressive episode in the year prior to the survey (Kessler & Bromet, 2013). With regards to stress, a four-year study of 60,000 workers by the Kenexa High-Performance Institute (2012) revealed that 34% of Brazilian workers are experiencing an unreasonable level of stress at work. This is the second highest percentage among the six countries that took part in the research. Finally, in terms of disengagement, the numbers again are not good: research from Gallup (2013) discovered that 73% of Brazilian workers are disengaged or actively disengaged.

An analysis of the causes of this situation would require more in-depth studies on different levels and areas (sociological, anthropological, historical and economic, among others). However, it is possible to emphasize some of the aspects that contribute to the situation presented above. They are:

1) A culture of using the system for one's benefit: unethical attitudes are not only tolerated but also practiced, even though this causes harm to society as a whole. The survey Ethical Profile of Professionals in Brazilian Corporations (ICTS Protiviti, 2015), conducted with 3,211 people from 45 private companies, revealed that:

- 69% of professionals say they are “flexible” and may act ethically or unethically depending on the circumstances.
- 52% of professionals tend to accept unethical acts unreservedly (the figure rises to between 55% and 59% for non-graduates).
- 48% of professionals are likely to take unethical shortcuts to achieve their goals.
- 38% of professionals would accept a bribe to benefit a supplier, depending on the circumstances (or 43%, in the case of men older than 34 who are non-graduates).

- 28% of professionals would use confidential information to benefit themselves or third parties (or 32% of managers older than 34 who are graduates).

2) Inadequate training of professionals on the market: poor education leads to unproductive and uncompetitive companies on the local and global market. Higher product market competition and better worker skills are essential to superior management practices (Bloom, Genakos, Sadun, & Van Reenen, 2012). However, in a study conducted by the authors with more than 10,000 companies from 20 countries, Brazil came in second to last place in terms of the quality of business management. Poor management also affects Brazilian schools. If we consider that higher management quality in schools is closely linked to better educational outcomes (Bloom, Lemos, Sadun, & Van Reenan, 2014), we can start to understand the enormous educational problem in Brazil and its effect on the country's development: of the 76 countries assessed by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development – OECD (2015) in terms of quality of education, Brazil came in 60th place.

3) The absence of a sense citizenship and belonging among Brazilians: an outdated education system that does not focus on character development. More than 80% of young Brazilians aged 15 to 20 have never participated in any movement or meeting to improve the life of their neighborhood or city, 90.3% say they do not engage in political participation and most acknowledge the political and institutional potential of promoting the desired changes, but do not see themselves participating directly in these changes (Ibase/Pólis, 2006). On the other hand, a study on the rising violence in Brazilian schools detected that these institutions do not pay enough attention on a day-to-day basis to values and interpersonal relationships focused on the principles of reciprocity, mutual respect and good manners (Santestevan, 2011).

## The Possible Solutions

Given the context described above, the SEMEAR project was designed based on the following focus areas:

### **C<sup>3</sup> (Commitment, Competence, Character).**

The reasons why people do not develop can be better understood if we apply James Prochaska and Carlo DiClemente's Transtheoretical Stages of Change model (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983). People in the Precontemplation stage do not intend to take action in the foreseeable future because they are uninformed or underinformed about the consequences of their behavior. They do not know they need to change, and the primary concern here is to raise awareness about it, and also to help them to identify their strengths and potential. In the Contemplation Stage, people intend to change but still don't know how, nor have they decided if it is worthwhile. To go through this stage, they need to develop skills and commitment. The other stages are Preparation (people have already taken some significant action, but they need to persevere); Action (people have made specific overt modifications in their lifestyles); and Maintenance (people are working to prevent relapse). In all these stages, it is necessary to have a sense of purpose, supportive relationships, motivation, engagement, self-mastery and continuous development.

This process requires **commitment** and the expansion of the knowledge necessary for the promotion of well-being and flourishing; the development of the **competence** required for this (the capacity to become a fully functional human being); and **character** (based on the understanding and the cultivation of values, strengths and virtues). The development of commitment, competence and character will be addressed by the SEMEAR Project's interventions, which will be described in four workbooks (for parents, teachers, organizations and communities). The workbooks will be used by the Foundation's volunteer coaches, who will apply the SEMEAR Project in families, schools and organizations.

**C+PP+P (Coaching + Positive Psychology + Philanthropy).**

The methods chosen to work on the three focus areas mentioned above are coaching, positive psychology and philanthropy. Coaching and positive psychology are an ideal combination for promoting well-being and flourishing. Kauffman (2006) has observed that positive psychology provides a strong theoretical and empirical foundation for the skillful practice of life and executive coaching. The author explains that the essence of positive psychology, like coaching, lies in the practitioner's decision to shift the focus away from pathology and pain and steer it towards strength, vision and dreams. Research areas in positive psychology (such as positive emotions, flow, hope and strengths) offer an abundant wealth of knowledge that can be explored for potential coaching interventions. I put this proposition to the test when I developed the first positive coaching training course in Brazil. Launched in 2012, the course has already trained 1,000 positive coaches and the preliminary data from research conducted with these coaches indicate that the combination of coaching and positive psychology is indeed useful when it comes to increasing life satisfaction and other fundamental aspects of the field of positive psychology (Victoria, 2014).

The third part of this triad is philanthropic activity supported by the principles of coaching and positive psychology, and carried out by volunteer coaches (who are already being recruited from among the more than 15,000 coaches trained by my company) to implement the SEMEAR Project in schools, organizations and communities – and, at a later stage, also as a government policy. Philanthropy also refers to donations from companies interested in joining forces with the Foundation to put into practice the project to make Brazil flourish.

Haidt (2003) asserts that one of the goals of positive psychology is to bring about a balanced reappraisal of human nature and human potential. The author suggests that one way to bring about this reappraisal is to apply what is learned for the common good. Specifically,

Haidt is talking about what he calls a good demonstration project, by which it would be possible to demonstrate moral/character education programs that work, or moral growth experiences for adults and adolescents that can touch and enrich their lives, programs focused on building strengths and triggering the positive moral emotions that may be more efficient than traditional reasoning-oriented interventions. The author also observes that, given the widespread current interest in service learning and volunteerism, there is clearly a significant market interest in programs that will make a difference in people's lives. My aim is to combine coaching, positive psychology and philanthropy to turn the SEMEAR Project into the "good demonstration project" referred to by Haidt (2003).

**Desired situation.**

The ideal situation intended by the SEMEAR Project is to see Brazil in full development with its citizens flourishing. At the 1st World Congress of the International Positive Psychology Association, Dr. Martin Seligman proposed an ambitious challenge: to increase the percentage of people in the world who are considered flourishing from today's 7-33% to 51% by the year 2051 (So, 2009). Inspired by Dr. Seligman's challenge, the vision I have established for the SBCoaching Foundation and the SEMEAR Project is to train 1,000,000 positive coaches who will directly or indirectly impact 50,000,000 people by 2050, thereby positively affecting 25% of the Brazilian population.

There is still no research indicating the current percentage of the Brazilian population that is flourishing (conducting this research is, incidentally, one of the future goals of the Foundation). However, given the current situation in the country presented in the introduction to this capstone, the promotion of flourishing in Brazil will not be an easy task – perhaps it will be a job for heroes, in the sense that a hero is someone who becomes so outraged by the situation that surrounds them (either by their own or other people's living conditions) that they attempt to find some strong distinguishing quality, talent or internal resource and use it

to change the reality around them. According to Rosenberg (2013), we learn with superheroes not how to become super but how to be heroes, and it happens when we choose the altruistic path.

## **Part II: The Metaphoric and Systemic Model for Effective Change**

In the book *Made to Stick*, Heath and Heath (2007) explain why some ideas survive and others die. To be memorable, an idea has to be understandable and effective in changing thoughts or behaviors. Simple, concrete, credible and emotional are also part of the equation. Guided by these principles, the SEMEAR Project uses metaphors to convey a message that can be easily understood by its target public. The first metaphor is the word SEMEAR. It is a Portuguese acronym that, adapted into English, means Self-actualization, development and optimization; Engagement and use of strengths and virtues; Meaning, mission and purpose; Energy, positive emotions and physical vitality; Achievement, goals and objectives; Relationships and interactions. These concepts represent the lines of intervention selected to promote flourishing and that, for this reason, make up the SEMEAR project.

In Portuguese, SEMEAR means to sow or to plant, and this is the basis for the metaphoric and systemic model on which the project was structured. The iconographic representation of the framework consists of a four-leaf clover – a metaphor to indicate that happiness can be cultivated – in which the four leaves express the areas of well-being to be targeted by positive interventions: physical and psychological, social, community and career (professional). The metaphors complement each other through the following expressions:

**The seeds:** the positive interventions that will comprise the project and that will be scientifically grounded in Part III of this capstone, and developed and applied in the workbooks.

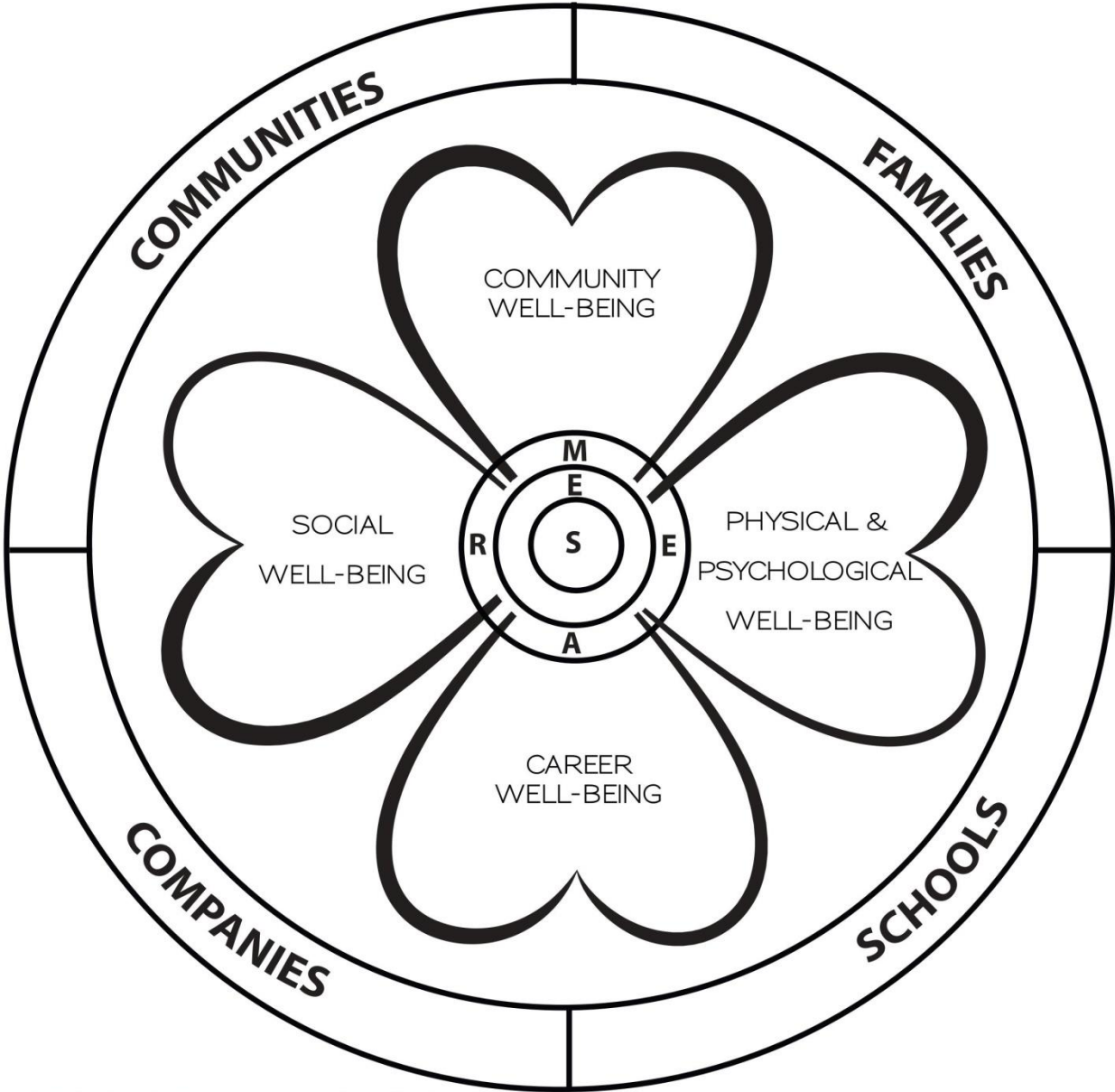
**The gardens:** the application areas, namely families and schools, communities and companies.



**The gardeners:** the change agents, who can be anyone from the coaches that participate in the project to the parents, educators and leaders who receive the interventions and who, in turn, act as multipliers. At this point, it is worth explaining the reasons why parents, educators and leaders were chosen as the primary target of the SEMEAR project:

- Parents are the backbone of the family, which is not just the cradle of culture and the foundation of future society, but also the center of social life. The successful education of children in the family will serve as support for their productive behavior as adults (Gokhale, 1980). From the perspective of positive psychology, it is possible to work with children and families to develop strengths and capacity building within individuals and systems (Sheridan et al., 2005).
- Educators can develop the ability to create a positive learning and teaching environment, which is essential for student achievement and well-being. There is a direct link between students' success and the school environment. "Students are more motivated to do well and to realize their full potential in schools that have a positive school climate, where they feel safe, included and supported" (Safe Schools Action Team, 2008, p. 1).
- Finally, leaders – understood here in their broadest sense, from business leaders to community leaders and even future leaders – can be encouraged by the project to develop a positive leadership: a leadership that, according to the definition given by Senge (1999), involves the capacity of a human community – people living and working together – to bring forth new realities. Senge also submitted that the notion of human communities creating new realities unifies the extraordinarily diverse individuals whom we see as exemplary leaders.

# SEMEAR PROJECT FRAMEWORK



## SEMEAR ACRONYM

- S:ELF-ACTUALIZATION, DEVELOPMENT & OPTIMIZATION
- E:NGAGEMENT & USE OF STRENGTHS AND VIRTUES
- M:EANING, MISSION & PURPOSE
- E:NERGY, POSITIVE EMOTIONS & PHYSICAL VITALITY
- A:CHIEVEMENTS, GOALS & OBJECTIVES
- R:ELATIONSHIPS & INTERACTIONS

The SEMEAR Project aims to promote sustainable change towards flourishing in the four well-being domains expressed by the Clover Model: physical and psychological, career, social and community. For the most part, these domains fit on the well-being model proposed by Rath and Harter (2010b) and are supported by Gallup's research conducted in more than 150 countries, covering almost 98% of the world's population. The main statistical factors that emerged from the study are the basis for Rath and Harter's well-being model, and also for the Clover Model. There are, however, two exceptions. Financial well-being, considered by Rath and Harter as a separate domain, is, in the Clover Model, part of the career field – based on the concept of gainful employment (Snyder, Lopez, & Pedrotti, 2011), financial well-being can be placed as one of many benefits that can flow from work. The second difference is that Rath and Harter's model reserves one domain for physical well-being, while the Clover Model includes psychological, as well as physical well-being, in the same domain. The inclusion was made because psychological well-being's six dimensions inspired and helped the development of the SEMEAR acronym, the instrumental base of the Clover Model. Psychological well-being's six dimensions are: relationships, self-acceptance, environmental mastery, purpose and personal growth (Ryff, 1989). Positive coaching interventions designed to increase well-being in the Clover Model's four domains are the strategies that will be employed to promote the necessary changes to bring about “the synergistic satisfaction of personal, organizational and collective needs of individuals, organizations and communities alike” (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2006, p. 12).

The choice of these four areas, as well as the concepts covered by the SEMEAR acronym, was based on comparative studies of various theories and areas of well-being described by different authors. Other examples include: personal, relational and collective well-being (Prilleltensky, 2005); PERMA (Seligman, 2011); positive emotions, positive psychological functioning and positive social functioning (Keyes, 2007); life satisfaction and

emotions (Diener, 2013); and competence, emotional stability, engagement, meaning, optimism, positive emotion, positive relationships, resilience, self-esteem and vitality (Huppert & So, 2013). The theoretical underpinnings of the chosen concepts, as well as studies that point to their relevance for the promotion of well-being and flourishing, will be presented next, in Part III of this capstone.

### **Part III: Literature Review**

#### **Positive Psychology, Well-Being and Flourishing Theories**

In this capstone, the notions of mental health, flourishing and well-being are essential to our proposal, introduced through the SEMEAR project. As previously stated, the SEMEAR project aims to make improvements to the well-being of individuals and communities through coaching. According to Kauffman and Scoular (2004), coaching and positive psychology are natural allies, since they share an explicit concern in valuing the total satisfaction of the human being, and they use a strengths-based approach to improve performance (Kauffman & Scoular, 2004). Coaching consists of a process focused on solutions and results, endowed with a methodological structure that is geared towards achieving goals. It increases individual and group accomplishments and promotes higher levels of well-being, motivation and personal and professional satisfaction (Da Matta & Victoria, 2012).

On a broad level, the coaching process generates full involvement with life, work and society. It enables the formation of a citizen who is more connected to the world, more virtuous and more satisfied (Da Matta & Victoria, 2012). Coaching seeks in positive psychology tools that produce results for coaches and coachees. In this sense, Biswas-Diener (2010) states that the coach can make use of this knowledge to observe what people do well and to help them achieve the most they are capable of, while growing individually or as a group. This is what we intend to accomplish through the SEMEAR project, in individual,

family, organizational and community realms. In this section, we briefly address the birth and major theoretical assumptions of positive psychology, and we also present the main theories of well-being and flourishing.

Positive psychology has had a significant impact since its emergence less than two decades ago (Pawelski, 2014). In 1998, Dr. Martin Seligman, as the new president of the American Psychological Association (APA), advocated that psychology was not only the study of illness, but also the study of strength and virtue (Seligman, 1999). According to Seligman (1999), psychology should treat not just what is damaged; it should cultivate the best within ourselves.

Seligman defended that psychology had become a science basically dedicated to mental disease and the mentally ill. Despite the relevance of the work of healing mental illness, this should not be the only work that psychology commits to (Seligman, 1999). Therefore, he called for a psychology whose mission would be “to utilize quality scientific research and scholarship to reorient [psychological] science and practice toward human strength” (p. 561). “Positive psychology” was the name conceived by Seligman to designate this new field of psychology.

Positive psychology sheds light on the fact that psychology is much more than a branch of medicine focused on pathologies. It should also concern work, education, love, growth and play (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Instead of focusing on disease, the science of positive psychology highlights people’s qualities, virtues and strengths; it focuses on things that make life worth living (Seligman, 1999). It aims to build knowledge on what environments contribute to the healthiest and happiest children, the most satisfied employees and the most committed citizens (Seligman, 1999).

Positive psychology investigates what makes people flourish and “what actions lead to well-being, to positive individuals, to flourishing communities, to a just society”

(Seligman, 1999, p. 562). The premise of positive psychology is in line with recent changes in the main psychological theories. These changes abandon the idea of the individual as a passive victim of his or her past, drives and environments. They give way to theories that conceive people as decision makers and active individuals, capable of increasing their self-efficacy, mastery and autonomy (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

For Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), the relevance of helping “normal” people become stronger relies on preventing them from getting emotionally ill, and that is one of the greatest benefits of positive psychology. Since its foundation, the area has focused on positive phenomena and developed many measures of strengths, such as scales of virtues, meaning and flow (Diener, 2013). One of its strongest concerns is applying scientific methods to explore positive subjective experience, positive individual traits and positive institutions (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

In fact, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) conceptualized positive psychology as a “science of positive subjective experience, positive individual traits and positive institutions” (p. 5). They defined three areas of study for the field: subjective, individual and group level. The first level concerns subjective experiences: well-being and satisfaction, hope and optimism, flow and happiness. The individual level is about positive individual traits: interpersonal skills, aesthetic sensibility, perseverance, forgiveness, spirituality, wisdom and capacity for love, for instance. The group level refers to civic virtues and the institutions that lead individuals toward better citizenship, like responsibility, altruism, civility, tolerance and work ethic.

Seligman’s plan was to unite professionals involved in the study of human strengths and positive attributes rather than addressing exclusively human problems (Diener, 2013). He managed to bring researchers and practitioners together, emphasizing a scientific grounding to underpin positive psychology (Diener, 2013). Currently, hundreds of researchers around

the world are committed to the advance of positive psychology, says Pawelski (2014). Specialized journals publish the research findings, well-attended conferences regularly take place and post-graduate programs are responsible for the training and development of new researchers and practitioners dedicated to flourishing and well-being (Pawelski, 2014).

Flourishing and well-being are at the core of positive psychology. Flourishing is about the experience of life going well; it entails the positive functioning of the human being, characterizing a combination of feeling good, living well and having a meaningful purpose (Seligman, 2011). Flourishing people have stronger immune systems, higher incomes and more creative ideas than their less happy peers (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). People can flourish and act, so their communities, schools, companies and institutions also flourish.

In communities, interpersonal flourishing can produce benefits, strengthening optimism in life in society and improving the health of its population (Ryff & Singer, 2000). The main goal of positive psychology is to increase flourishing, and flourishing is the crucial standard for measuring well-being (Seligman, 2011). Well-being “is the topic of positive psychology” (Seligman, 2011, p. 54).

Subjective well-being is defined as the cognitive and emotional assessment that a person makes of their life (Diener, Lucas, & Oishi, 2002). Diener (1984) proposed that subjective well-being has three components: positive affect/emotions, negative affect/emotions and life satisfaction. Later, Diener, Eunkook, Lucas and Smith (1999) added another element: specific domains of life satisfaction, such as health, career and relationships. Domain satisfaction and life satisfaction are considered cognitive components of subjective well-being because they are based on evaluative beliefs – or attitudes – about one’s life. Positive and negative affect and emotions, meanwhile, are considered affective components because they reflect the amount of pleasure and pain that people experience in their lives.

According to Huppert and So (2013), research has indicated that high levels of well-being are beneficial for people and society. Data from cross-sectional, longitudinal and experimental studies have shown association between high levels of well-being and a range of positive outcomes, such as effective learning, productivity, good relationships and good health (Huppert & So, 2013). In one experiment, Larsen and Diener (1985) asked volunteers to record the emotions they experienced every day, for 30 to 90 days. When calculating the proportions between positive and negative emotions, the researchers found that there is a correlation between emotional well-being and life satisfaction, indicating a dynamic interaction between the cognitive and affective components of subjective well-being.

Several scales have been developed within the sphere of well-being, some of which focus on life satisfaction, like the Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). This scale is comprised of five questions that stimulate the individual to judge their life as a whole and, from there, to assess their satisfaction. The Flourishing Scale (Diener et al., 2009), meanwhile, was created to measure aspects associated with flourishing, such as meaning and engagement. It contains eight statements – such as “I lead a purposeful and meaningful life” and “I am engaged and interested in my daily activities” – to be scored on a scale of 1 to 7, from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (7).

Keyes and Waterman (2013) define well-being in subjective terms as people’s perceptions and evaluations of their life concerning affective states and psychological and social functioning. The author also makes a distinction between emotional, psychological and social well-being. Emotional well-being refers to a set of symptoms related to the presence or the absence of positive feelings, as well as the presence or absence of positive functioning in life (Keyes, 2002).

For Keyes and Ryff (1995), positive functioning comprises six aspects of psychological well-being: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, personal growth,



purpose in life, environmental mastery and autonomy. In this regard, people are functioning well when they maintain supporting relationships, develop into better people, possess a direction in life and are capable of changing their environments to fulfil their needs, with a degree of self-determination (Keyes, 2002). Moreover, Keyes (1998) asserts that positive functioning also includes social challenges. Hence, the author proposes five dimensions of social well-being: social coherence, social actualization, social interaction, social acceptance and social contribution.

Meanwhile, Rath and Harter (2010b) define well-being as a combination of love for one's occupation, positive relationships, satisfying finances, good health and a sense of meaning and purpose – the feeling of being useful to our community. They address five distinct dimensions of well-being: career, community, social, physical and financial. Well-being is not only about being successful, neither is it restrained to physical health; concentrating exclusively on one of the five elements may lead to frustration or even failure. The five elements are interdependent, and what is most important is how they interact (Rath & Harter, 2010b). These components were defined based on research conducted by Gallup in dozens of countries, explain the authors. They claim that career well-being is an essential element, since people with high career well-being are likely to flourish in their lives (Rath & Harter, 2010b).

Gallup's data indicate that if people do not have the opportunity to do what they enjoy on a regular basis, their chance of achieving high levels of well-being decrease. Using our strengths, spending more time with people we like, who share our mission and encourage our growth are some steps that contribute to career well-being (Rath & Harter, 2010b). Social well-being, meanwhile, concerns having strong relationships, and being surrounded by people who encourage and accept us. Financial well-being is related to being satisfied with our overall standard of living. Physical well-being is about having good health and the energy

for our daily activities. Community well-being is linked to the sense of engagement with the social environment you live in (Rath & Harter, 2010b).

Also addressing the matter of well-being, Seligman (2002) initially proposed that it is comprised of three essential elements: pleasure, engagement and meaning. Later, Seligman (2011) presented two more elements – relationships and accomplishment. The five components comprise the acronym PERMA, and together they define well-being. Well-being is a construct, says Seligman (2011), composed of measurable elements, each one pursued for its own sake. No single one of these five elements defines well-being, but they all contribute to it. Well-being consists of a combination of feeling good, as well as actually having meaning, good relationships and accomplishment.

According to Prilleltensky (2005, 2011), individual well-being is highly dependent on the well-being of the relationships a person maintains and on the community to which he or she belongs. The author defines well-being as “a positive state of affairs in which the personal, relational and collective needs and aspirations of individuals and communities are fulfilled” (Prilleltensky, 2005, p. 54). He introduces the value of justice as a fundamental element for well-being, and also highlights that enhancing strengths, prevention, empowerment and community conditions is crucial for the promotion of well-being, proposing the acronym SPECS to address these elements.

Prilleltensky (2005) stresses the importance of strength-based, preventive, empowering and community-oriented approaches to enhancing personal and collective well-being. In this context, projects that concomitantly develop personal skills and attempt to change adverse community conditions are strongly recommended. Moreover, economic prosperity, health promotion, meaningful functioning, equality and inclusion on both community and organizational levels are referred to by Prilleltensky (2011) as necessary for people to flourish.

Prilleltensky et al. (2015) proposes an instrument to measure the different dimensions of well-being: Interpersonal, Community, Occupational, Physical, Psychological, and Economic, which forms the I COPPE acronym. These dimensions help community researchers to identify how individuals and also groups perform in key domains of life and create proper interventions (Prilleltensky et al., 2015). The I COPPE Scale contains 21 items that assess seven well-being components: Interpersonal, Community, Occupational, Physical, Psychological, Economic, and Overall Well-being. Each one of the components is measured with three time period items: past (a year ago), present and future (a year from now). The I COPPE Scale constitutes a valuable tool since it measures important well-being domains with a single multidimensional instrument and it is useful in individuals, groups or communities interventions (Prilleltensky et al., 2015).

### **Self-Actualization, Development and Optimization**

Human growth and development, from the cradle to the grave, have been studied to expand our knowledge of what constitutes happiness and well-being. A common metaphor used to describe this process is that of “movement” from one state to another (transition), which implies growth, progression and evolution (Newman & Newman, 2008). Overcoming limitations and optimizing human potential are also associated with the idea of development, a fundamental principle of coaching (Da Matta & Victoria, 2011). Thus, a key topic for the SEMEAR project concerns how people achieve their full potential (Maslow, 1954; Rogers, 1977) by achieving high levels of performance (Garfield, 1987) and optimizing their levels of resilience and coping with life’s challenges (e.g., Folkman, 1997; Reivich & Shatte, 2002).

Aristotle had already proposed the hypothesis that people have a “natural tendency” to seek growth and to realize their full potential. This is why they tend to pursue challenges and discover new perspectives on life (Da Matta & Victoria, 2012). This idea was later taken up again by humanistic psychologists and, more recently, by positive psychology.

Based on his theory of happiness, presented in *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle postulates that the greatest goal of life is eudaimonia, which he enshrines as a central purpose of human life and a goal in itself. Eudaimonia is frequently translated as well-being, happiness or “human flourishing” – or, in the words of Seligman (2002), “authentic happiness”. Aristotle postulated that to have a happy life requires the fulfillment of an array of conditions, including physical and mental well-being. To achieve this state, individuals need to use their talents to their utmost potential and remain faithful to their values not just at one given moment, but throughout their lives (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2006).

The eudaimonic search for psychological growth and the realization of one’s potential is consistent with the vision of Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers, leaders in the Humanistic Psychology movement, on the process of self-actualization. Maslow defined self-actualization as the urge to become what one is capable of being by striving to make the most of one’s own potential (Maslow, 1954). Self-actualization is a natural and dynamic life-long process of growth and achieving one’s potential. This process occurs through a full and selfless experience, which requires total concentration and absorption (Assagioli, 1961; Burleson, 2005; Ford & Procidano, 1990; Goldman & Olczak, 1975; Maslow, 1954).

While Rogers (1977) created a theory on “growth potential” conducive to the emergence of the fully functioning person, it was Maslow (1943) who formulated a psychological hierarchy of needs. He submitted that the fulfillment of these needs theoretically leads to the fulfillment of “being values” – that is, the needs that are on the highest level of this hierarchy. Achieving this leads to self-actualization and a sense of accomplishment.

Therefore, like an evolutionary process, self-actualization becomes the most prominent human need, as individuals advance in their development (Maslow, 1954). This necessarily involves a progression, as basic needs must first be met and maintained over a

period before focus can be put on self-actualizing behaviors (Ivtzan, Gardner, Bernard, Sekhon, & Hart, 2013).

Maslow's thinking on self-actualization has its origins in the work of Carl Jung (1958), who describes the process of achieving self-realization. This process can be understood as the fulfillment by oneself of the possibilities of one's character or personality. The individuation process, or Jung's concept of self-realization, is considered his main contribution to the theories of personality development. Self-realization is the final stage of Jung's stages of development. Within this stage, there is still some room for growth and progression.

Self-realization is attained through the process of becoming an individual, or individuation (Jung, 1958). The origin of the word is *individuus*, which means "undivided" or "individual" in Latin. It is a process in which individual beings are formed and differentiated; more specifically, it relates to the development of the psychological individual. According to Jung (1958), self-realization is a natural transformation aimed at developing the individual personality. As a result, the individuated person is more imbued with consciousness to act on behalf of others and promote well-being and integrity in their interactions. This profile correlates with the philanthropic needs that motivate voluntary actions, for example (see Payton & Moody, 2008; Piliavin, 2003).

Accordingly, self-actualizers are good at coping with life's problems and they are psychologically well adjusted and can focus their energy on the present (Ford & Procidano, 1990). Coping, which is related to positive affect, has been referred to as pursuing and finding positive meaning (Folkman, 1997; Fredrickson, 2000; Yamasaki, Sakai, & Uchida, 2006).

Consequently, to achieve a state of optimal development and to flourish as individuals, people first need to overcome their limitations and master psychological aspects

associated with the ability to persevere through challenges, to recover after experiencing adversity or to continue living a purposeful life after experiencing hardship and adversity (Reivich & Shatte, 2002).

How people typically respond to problems is of crucial importance. Particularly how they assess their problem-solving skills and whether in general they confront or avoid the issues that life presents (Shankland, França, Genolini, Guelfi, & Ionescu, 2009). Among the positive characteristics of resilient individuals, Reivich and Shatte (2002) mention self-efficacy, emotion awareness/regulation, impulse control, optimism, flexible and accurate thinking, empathy and connection.

Moreover, resilient people are more optimistic. They believe that things can change for the better and that no hardship is permanent. They have hope for the future and believe they can control the direction of their lives. Optimistic thinkers, as compared to pessimistic ones, are physically healthier, less likely to suffer from depression, more productive and successful. These characteristics have been confirmed by hundreds of well-controlled studies (Brunwasser, Gillham, & Kim, 2009; Masten & Obradovic, 2006; Reivich & Shatte, 2002).

Thus, how people evaluate their problem-solving abilities and methods is closely linked to a number of psychological adjustment elements. For example, a more positive (as opposed to negative) problem-solving appraisal has been linked to a positive self-concept, less depression and anxiety, and to vocational adjustment (Heppner & Lee, 2009).

In coaching, the enhancement of problem-solving skills is also a part of fulfilling one's potential and is exemplified in the concept of peak performance developed by Garfield (1987) and later expanded by other researchers, such as Malhi and Reasoner (2000). Peak performance refers to the ability of an individual, team or organization to achieve moments of maximum performance. Individuals who achieve such moments are called peak performers and may be higher achievers, i.e. people or groups of people who produce excellent results in

different areas of life, or ordinary people who have developed positive attributes that allow them to generate extraordinary results (Garfield, 1987; Malhi & Reasoner, 2000).

Peak performers encounter just as many obstacles and challenging situations as any other person. However, persistence and resilience are what drive them forward. “No matter how rough it gets, no matter how great the assault on body and mind, peak performers always feel they can do something. Invariably, they move on” (Garfield, 1987, p. 20). Ultimately, coaching processes stimulate and value sustainable excellence, thereby increasing the amount and the quality of the time in which a person displays their best performance (Da Matta & Victoria, 2011). By aiming at achieving a high level of human development, the context of coaching allows the presentation of “user-friendly applications of positive psychological knowledge” (Grant & Spence, 2010, p. 177).

In terms of scaling, the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) measures individuals’ level of resilience. It consists of 25 items, each rated on a 5-point scale (0–4), with higher scores reflecting greater resilience (Connor & Davidson, 2003). This scale is a scientifically proven tool that can assess resilience to challenges and situations of stress, for example. Also, the Problem Solving Inventory (PSI) has been one of the most widely used self-report inventories to assess an individual’s problem-solving abilities (Heppner & Lee, 2009). In the PSI, perceptions of one’s problem-solving capability, style, behavior and attitudes are assessed. The PSI consists of 35 six-point Likert-type items (1 - “strongly agree” to 6 - “strongly disagree”) and uses a total score and three subscale scores. The three subscales address Problem-Solving Confidence (11 items), Approach-Avoidance Style (16 items), Personal Control (5 items), and three filler items.

As we can see, human beings need nutriment that are essential to psychological growth and integrity over the course of their lifetime. They need them to maximize their capacity to reach their full potential and, in doing so, evolve to higher levels of well-being

and happiness (Carstensen, 2006; Eysenck, 1975; Ryan 1995). By employing strategies to cope with life's challenges, human beings may move forward on a path of optimized development and even thrive.

### **Energy, Positive Emotions and Physical Vitality**

Two key elements that make up the framework of the SEMEAR project are physical and psychological well-being. To promote flourishing in these areas, the SEMEAR project will act on two measurable elements: positive emotions and physical vitality. Positive emotions are both an indicator and a producer of flourishing (Fredrickson, 2001), as well as the first pillar of the well-being theory expressed in the PERMA model (Seligman, 2011). As for vitality, it is associated with the subjective experience of energy and aliveness (Mutrie & Faulkner, 2004; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). On one hand, positive emotions concern psychological well-being; on the other, physical vitality is related to physical well-being. These domains are two sides of the same coin in the sense that both spheres of well-being are intimately linked, and both are equally crucial for elevating individuals' levels of energy.

#### **Positive emotions.**

Positive emotions are a driving force for well-being and satisfaction. For Seligman (2011), a "pleasant life" is one that is lived entirely around positive emotions. However, as important as positive emotions may be, they alone are not enough to generate long-lasting well-being. That is why the author's theory on well-being also includes the other four elements that are part of PERMA (Seligman, 2011).

This kind of emotion is not restricted to stimulation in the present. Seligman (2004, p. 206) asserts that "you can move your emotions in a positive direction by changing how you feel about your past, how you think about the future, and how you experience the present". Among the positive emotions related to the future are optimism, hope, faith, confidence and security. Those related to the present and most commonly mentioned by people when they



talk about “happiness” include joy, ecstasy, tranquility, enthusiasm, pleasure and flow. Positive emotions prompted by the past are satisfaction, contentment, fulfillment, pride and serenity.

According to Seligman (2004), to intensify pleasure in the present, one can raise the amount of happiness one momentarily experiences by using the processes of dishabituation, savoring and mindfulness, as demonstrated by scientific studies on positive emotions. Behind these techniques lies the idea that a stagnant or everyday situation can be turned into a fresh and renovated one. Habituation can be countered by spacing out pleasures carefully and arranging surprises to avoid becoming accustomed to both bodily and higher types of delights. Savoring – defined by Bryant and Veroff (2007) as the consciousness of pleasure and of the intentional attention to the experience of pleasure – and mindfulness can be stimulated by sharing one’s pleasures with others, taking mental photographs, congratulating oneself, sharpening one’s perceptions and surrendering to ecstasy and absorption. To increase the intensity of the pleasures experienced, strategies such as basking, giving thanks, marveling and luxuriating can be used (Seligman, 2004).

Thus, positive emotions are not only indicators of health and well-being: they *produce* health and well-being. They are also some of the mechanisms that enable us to survive and evolve. According to the broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, 2001), positive emotions broaden thought-action repertoires and build a wide range of consequential personal, physical, intellectual, social and psychological resources. These personal resources include increased mindfulness, the ability to savor positive experiences, purpose in life, the social support we give and receive, and fewer illnesses. They serve as reserves we can resort to when dealing with threats (Fredrickson, 2001).

The cumulative effect of broadening and building that positive emotions produce can make people better. Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, and Finkel (2008) note that the

development of personal resources brings benefits such as greater satisfaction in life and being less prone to developing symptoms of depression. In other words, the broaden-and-build theory suggests that positive emotions drive human flourishing. Fredrickson and Joiner (2002) posit that positive emotions are not limited to optimizing how we function only in the present – that is, the instant we experience them. Their effect can last for a long time. They broaden our ability to reason and our perception, which helps us to build our source of internal resources for dealing with adversity. In turn, this improved coping should lead to situations in the future where we experience positive emotions. As this virtuous cycle perpetuates itself, it helps to consolidate people's psychological resilience and emotional well-being, explain the authors.

Additionally, one of the foundations of the broaden-and-build theory is that repeated occurrences of positive emotions give origin to upward spirals of sustained well-being (Garland et al., 2010). Fredrickson and Joiner (2002) demonstrate that upward spiral predictions imply that positive emotions can continue to increase exponentially over time, which contributes to long-term emotional well-being. Downward spirals, on the other hand, cause cycles of increasingly negative emotions. They can lead to self-destructive behaviors and critical levels of depression (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002; Garland et al., 2010).

In regards to physical health, positive emotions can play an essential role in optimizing the way individuals function both psychologically and physically (Fredrickson, 2001). In other words, positive emotions are not just an end in itself, but also a means to achieve psychological growth and better overall psychological and physical health over time (Fredrickson, 2009a).

### **Physical vitality.**

The relationship between physical vitality, well-being and positive emotions has been observed for centuries, ever since the body began to be studied as an instrument for the

fulfillment of the human endeavor on Earth. From a holistic point of view, Socrates said that the very act of thinking is influenced by the body's physical health (Xenophon, trans. 1990). Thus, the ways we experience our body and our somatic awareness of its instrumental function help develop the mind (Shusterman, 2006). Likewise, states of physical and psychological well-being are the practical results of these experiences (Boehm, Peterson, Kivimaki, & Kubzansky, 2011; Mutrie & Faulkner, 2004).

In our hyper-connected, high-tech, competitive and fast-paced world, the human brain is required to work harder and faster (see Ratey & Loehr, 2011). To do so, the brain needs several proteins that “play pivotal roles in the mechanisms of our highest thought processes” (Ratey & Hagerman, 2013, p. 7). These proteins are produced when we move our muscles. However, sedentary lifestyles have removed physical activity from our lives (Mutrie & Faulkner, 2004). Time spent sedentarily may negatively impact emotional experiences and, consequently, erode psychosocial resources (Hogan, Catalino, Mata, & Fredrickson, 2015).

Mostly, the consequences of physical activity paint a picture of personal growth and well-being. In contrast, sedentary lifestyles in our modern world conjure up an image of stagnation, and pose “one of the biggest threats to our continued survival” (Ratey & Hagerman, 2013, p. 3). The epidemic levels of stress and obesity, as well as the physical, mental and psychological problems stemming from these unhealthy habits, are not at all surprising. Smoking, poor diet and lack of exercise are some of the biggest challenges faced by society today (Rath & Harter, 2010a). Also, lack of sufficient physical activity has been linked to at least 17 unhealthy conditions. Among them, chronic illnesses or considered risk factors for chronic illnesses (Booth, Gordon, Carlson, & Hamilton, 2000).

As a counterpoint, vitality is defined as having plenty of physical and mental energy, and as a salient and functionally significant indicator of good physical health and motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2008). A person may feel such aliveness through physical well-being,

psychological integration and experiences of meaning and purpose (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

People with vitality also show enthusiasm, which they direct toward whatever activities they choose to engage in (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), including physical activities. Recreational tasks that satisfy needs, such as skilled sports, can foster vitality, as can most intrinsically motivated actions (Ryan & Deci, 2008).

According to Mutrie and Faulkner (2004), physical activity is a human behavior that epitomizes the principles of positive psychology, and psychological well-being can be connected to regular physical exercise. Furthermore, Lyubomirsky (2008) claims that the reason we feel good when we exercise could be physiological in origin. Similarly, Ratey and Loehr (2011) point to evidence that suggests that physical activity has a positive influence on brain functions and cognitive process in particular, such as attention, learning, and memory. This occurs at the systemic, molecular and cellular levels, and it is related to changes in brain volume and cerebral blood flow, among other factors (Ratey & Loehr, 2011).

In their research, Ratey and Hagerman (2013) propose that exercise has a profound impact on people's mental health. Neurochemicals and growth factors generated by exercise can reduce levels of stress or chronic depression, as they physically enhance the brain's infrastructure and reduce anxiety (Lyubomirsky, 2008; Ratey & Hagerman, 2013). Furthermore, several studies link physical activity to sleep quality, mindfulness, as well as the reduced risk of incident coronary heart disease, obesity and hypertension (Boehm, Peterson, Kivimaki, & Kubzansky, 2011; Loprinzi & Cardinal, 2011; Mothes, Klaperski, Seelig, Schimidt, & Fuchs, 2014).

To assess the positive and negative emotions related to physical and psychological well-being, one can use the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS). This scale, developed by Watson, Clark and Tellegen (1988), consists of two 10-item mood scales that

describe different feelings and emotions. The items are given a score that ranges from 1 - Very slightly or not at all, to 5 – Extremely. The Psychological Well-being Scales, created by Carol Ryff (1989), develop this further by breaking this construct down into the following dimensions: Self-acceptance, Positive relations with others, Autonomy, Environmental mastery, Purpose in life, and Personal growth. The scales have 20 items each, analyzed separately, and the responses vary from strongly agreeing to strongly disagreeing. Also, the I COPPE Scale (Prilleltensky et al., 2015), previously mentioned in this capstone, assesses both physical and psychological well-being constructs through psychometric properties. For the authors, physical well-being can be defined as satisfaction with one's general health and wellness, and psychological well-being refers to the satisfaction with one's emotional life. The I COPPE Scale, therefore, can be used to organize interventions that cater to the unique profile of individuals, groups or communities (Prilleltensky et al., 2015).

With regards to opportunities for promoting physical and psychological well-being, specific exercises and activities can positively affect people's lives in different domains. Studies show that experiencing positive emotions, such as joy, interest and satisfaction, more frequently and negative emotions less often accounted for a significant portion of the indirect effects of physical activity on psychosocial resources and, therefore, on health and well-being (Cohen & Pressman, 2006; Hogan, Catalino, Mata, & Fredrickson, 2015).

At an individual level, physical activity can prevent mental illness, foster positive emotions and buffer individuals against stress in life. Within the family context, it is possible to increase family play through activities that encourage parents and children to engage with one another in a healthy context (Mutrie & Faulkner, 2004).

At schools, physical and personal health can be promoted as a part of formal education. The school community can be provided with not only basic health care information, but also guidance on how to access information from periodicals, books and

databases to keep up with the times. This also encourages children and adolescents to be more active and physically and psychologically healthy (Friedman, 1997). Furthermore, programs geared towards physical well-being in the school context can help promote social interaction among isolated groups (Mutrie & Faulkner, 2004).

Meanwhile, at the organizational level, interventions that increase physical activities in the workplace can contribute to improved physical and mental health and company results (Ratey & Loehr, 2011). The corporate environment offers highly favorable conditions for increasing awareness on the benefits of physical activity and encouraging people to adopt and commit to fitness programs. Ratey and Loehr (2011) suggest that companies can use emails, meetings between departments, online programs, and other resources to implement tailored strategies aimed at increasing physical activity levels and improving their employees' health and performance.

Finally, a community in which physical activity is seen as the social norm may be healthier and physical exercise increases communities' social capital (Mutrie & Faulkner, 2004). Physical activity is a process that allows for meaningful social interaction while serving as a healthy vehicle for networking in community settings. This can occur, for example, by building a sense of community by executing projects involving physical activity to increase social contact and promote neighborhood networks (Mutrie & Faulkner, 2004).

### **Meaning, Purpose and Mission**

Meaning and purpose are central notions in positive psychology. Meaning in life consists of an important variable for human well-being (Steger, 2009). In fact, Prilleltensky and Prilleltensky (2006) underline that multiple evidence connects personal well-being to meaning. Meaning is identified as a fundamental component of "good life" (King & Napa, 1998; Scollon & King, 2004). It is also one of the five elements that massively contribute to well-being, according to Seligman's (2011) PERMA. In order to accomplish a meaningful

life, advocates Seligman (2011), an individual must belong to something he believes transcends the self, which can be positive institutions like family, religion or a political or environmental cause, for instance.

Zika and Chamberlain (1987) observed that among a series of personality variables – locus of control, assertiveness and meaning in life – meaning was the most consistent predictor of psychological well-being in college students. In fact, meaning has been positively linked to psychological well-being at almost all stages of the lifespan, including adolescence and late adulthood (Zika & Chamberlain, 1992). Reker and Wong (1988) note that the experience of meaning in life occurs when a person has a perception that his or her life is coherent. Meanwhile, Frankl (1984) associates meaning with personal accomplishments, relationships with others or experiences with art and nature.

For Prilleltensky and Prilleltensky (2006), subjective well-being concerns feeling satisfied and fulfilled with the general course of one's life. Individuals high in subjective well-being usually experience life as rewarding and enjoyable. They maintain mutually fulfilling relationships, see meaning in their activities, and have a sense of control over many areas of their lives. They are hopeful and optimistic, they set goals, engage to attain them, and focus their resources to overcome obstacles along the way.

The capacity to extract meaning from our experiences permeates our lives and is essential to the advancement of humanity (Steger, 2009). The so-called meaningful life holds value, conceptually relating meaning to other well-being elements such as satisfaction and self-esteem. In this sense, one's life or self is perceived to be fulfilled with satisfaction, esteem or worth.

Meaning in life may also be defined as a sense of having a purpose or spending time and energy in the pursuit of valuable goals (Ryff & Singer, 1998). Meaning is a sense through which we interpret and organize things, understanding our own value and place in the world

(Steger, 2009). Steger (2009) explains that definitions and operationalizations of meaning usually vary across studies, but it is generally referred to as “purpose, significance or as a multifaceted construct” (p. 680). The author underlines that meaning helps us define what really matters to us, and properly direct the necessary energy in order to accomplish it.

Meaning concerns individuals’ beliefs that their lives are relevant, that their existence has a bigger purpose that transcends the present. It is related to people’s search for their most moving drives and aims (Steger, 2009) as much as to purpose and goals (Emmons, 2003). Emmons (2003) defined four component areas of meaning: work/achievement, intimacy/relationships, spirituality and self-transcendence/generativity.

People have meaning in life when they stand for something, have clear goals and believe they have figured out the great scheme of things, says Steger (2009). It also involves the degree to which a person figures out a purpose or mission. Hence, meaning comes from comprehending one’s existence, defining and accomplishing relevant goals and feeling fulfilled, or even combinations of these three aspects (Steger, 2009).

According to Steger (2012), purpose and significance seem to be essential to concepts of meaning in life. These definitions are related to being able to understand where we have been, where we are now and where we are going to (Steger, 2009). We can find meaning by engaging in creative activities or enlightening experiences, or even by reflecting upon negative experiences (Frankl, 1963).

Frankl (1963) indicates that people’s experiences overcoming adversity are associated with meaning. In this context, four domains contribute to meaning: a sense of purpose, a sense of self-worth, a clear values system to judge right from wrong and a sense of efficacy (Baumeister, 1991; Baumeister & Vohs, 2002). Beyond the context of coping, studies have demonstrated that meaningful activities are commonly linked to enjoyment



(Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Ryan & Deci, 2001). For Reker and Wong (1988), achieving personal meaning is always accompanied by feelings of satisfaction and fulfillment.

King et al. (2006) conducted a set of experiments in order to investigate the relation between positive affect and meaning in life. Starting from the idea that the experience of meaning could enhance an individual's positive feelings, the authors decided to determine whether the inverse was valid: if positive affect contributes to meaning. The combined results of six studies showed that positive affect also enhances the experience of meaning in life, being strongly linked to meaning. Also, primed and induced positive affect led to enhanced meaning-in-life judgments. Moreover, evidence suggested that positive mood may function as a readiness for the experience of meaning. King et al. (2006) concluded that positive affect may be experienced as the natural state of meaning, perhaps partly because of the facilitation of meaningful experience caused by positive mood, and partly because of the response biases fostered by that state.

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) mentions that meaning may be associated with the idea that events are temporally and causally related to each other in terms of a final goal. The author states that bringing up meaning demands organizing the contents of the mind by unifying an individual's actions into a whole and coherent flow experience. People with a sense of meaning mostly have goals that concentrate all their energy, challenging them and giving significance to their lives. For Csikszentmihalyi (1990), meaning is as much about knowing one's desires and working with purpose to accomplish them, as it is about having congruent feelings, thoughts and actions in an inner state of harmony. All human cultures comprise meaning systems that may function as a base for the purpose by which people can define their goals (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

People commonly point to relationships with others as the most important origin of meaning in their lives (Steger, 2009). In order to cultivate a feeling of purpose and belonging,

people need to be able to share their lives with others, and have support from those they are fond of (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2006). Purpose may be conceptualized as an essential, self-organizing life aim. It is a fundamental theme of a person's identity (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009). If we visualize people positioning descriptors of their personality on a dartboard, purpose would be close to the innermost, concentric circle. Purpose is self-organizing since it provides a framework for systematic behavior patterns in everyday life (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009).

Purpose motivates an individual to direct resources in specific directions to accomplish particular goals and not others (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009). McKnight & Kashdan (2009) underline that purpose provides a bedrock foundation that stimulates people to cope better when facing stress and strain. The development of purpose requires the pursuit of self-concordant goals, explain the authors. The intensity with which a person's strivings reflect his or her innermost values and interests are the crucial element that defines self-concordant goals (cf. Sheldon & Elliot, 1999; Sheldon & Kasser, 1998).

Purpose provides a testable, causal system that integrates outcomes related to life expectancy, satisfaction and mental and physical health (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009). These outcomes, clarify the authors, may be properly explained by considering a person's motivation, which comes from possessing a purpose. McKnight and Kashdan (2009) discuss indirect evidence suggesting physical and mental health constitutes outcomes significantly influenced by purpose. In fact, there is initial evidence of the benefits of commitment to a purpose in life on the daily existence of people with social anxiety disorder (Kashdan & McKnight, 2013).

The authors hypothesize that behaving in congruence with one's purpose causes a flooding effect into other life domains that contribute to enhance psychological, physical and social well-being (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009). Purpose also leads to more behavioral

consistency in the context of occupational routines, such as engaging in activities in order to reduce work-related and family psychological conflicts, or increasing overall vitality and engagement in life (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009).

For Prilleltensky and Prilleltensky (2006), spiritual engagement may be strongly related to meaning in life. It is about comprehending one's values, feelings, thoughts and actions as having a greater significance. When a person is capable of integrating all these elements into a harmonious whole, then a measure of spiritual engagement and a solid sense of meaning come with it.

In terms of experimental research, meaning is gauged by the PERMA-Profiler, which explicitly evaluates all five PERMA components (Butler & Kern, 2013). The 16-item PERMA-Profiler, still going through testing and development, has three items for each of the five PERMA elements, and one item for 'overall well-being'. Each item is scored on an 11-point Likert scale, from 0 (never) to 10 (always), or 0 (not at all) to 10 (completely), while experiences are evaluated from a range of different responses, for example, 'in general', 'how often', 'to what extent', and 'how much of the time' (Butler & Kern, 2013).

In the organizational environment, there are associations between people who perceive work as personally meaningful and have a high level of commitment to the company. Engaged employees invest more in their work, are capable of putting up with short deadlines and long work hours if they see them as necessary for the success of the organization. They are also more likely to take initiative and offer help, as well as present lower turnover rates and absenteeism (Warr, 1999).

At the social level, Prilleltensky and Prilleltensky (2006) highlight that meaningful engagement in one's community represents a sign of well-being, as well as a marker of a healthy community. Personally, each one of us has a life narrative, a path and a life mission.

A mission consists of the strengths and values that can drive the action of an individual towards their goals. Formally establishing a personal mission clarifies the strengths and values that will guide you during the pursuit of achievement (Morrissey, 1992). In a study conducted by Rabow, Wrubel and Remen (2009), medical students were told to prepare their own personal mission statements in a training course. The analysis of the results suggested that the mission statements focused on competencies necessary for a good professional practice, namely expertise, commitment, inspiration and sensibility in the relationship with patients, indicating the relevance of commitment to a purpose.

Research indicates that people who believe their lives have meaning or purpose are happier (Debats, van der Lubbe, & Wezeman, 1993), report more well-being (Bonebright, Clay, & Ankenmann, 2000) and life satisfaction (Steger, Kashdan, Sullivan, & Lorentz, 2008), and present more engagement at work (Steger & Dik, 2009). Also, people who have devoted their lives to a greater cause profess higher levels of meaning than others (Steger, 2009). Moreover, stimulating individuals to experience positive emotion helps to strengthen meaning, which is assessed by self-reports (Hicks & King, 2008; King et al., 2006). In this regard, stresses Steger (2009), the relation between meaning and positive emotions appears to be bidirectional.

### **Engagement and Use of Strengths and Virtues**

Engagement and use of strengths and virtues have been identified as relevant for well-being (see Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Seligman, 2011). This is why they are part of the SEMEAR project. In this section, they will both be addressed in terms of benefits and importance to well-being and human flourishing.

#### **Engagement.**

Engagement is a state characterized by vitality and absorption (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, & Bakker, 2002), and it is also about flow: “being one with the music, time

stopping, and the loss of self-consciousness during an absorbing activity” (Seligman, 2011, p. 35). According to Csikszentmihalyi (1990), flow refers to a psychological state that follows deeply engaging activities. Flow is worthwhile not only because it makes the present moment more significant and enjoyable, but also because it empowers us with the self-confidence necessary for developing skills and doing our best to make a difference and offer great contributions to society and mankind (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Schaufeli (2011) notes that engaged workers are more active, satisfied and self-confident, provide their own positive feedback and cultivate values that meet organization policies. Engagement at work also improves autonomous regulation, motivation, good health and quality social relations (Bakker et al., 2008; Van Beek et al., 2011). Schaufeli (2011) clarifies that strategies for enhancing engagement include strengths-based approaches, besides behavioral interventions (e.g., sharing positive news, showing gratitude), cognitive interventions (e.g., cultivating optimism) and motivational interventions (e.g., pursuing meaningful goals) for individuals and for teams. Organization-based interventions, leadership training and career development are also used (Schaufeli, 2011).

In organizational settings, Harter, Schmidt and Hayes (2002) indicate a significant correlation between employee engagement and business outcomes. On this point, Bakker (2014) addresses so-called work engagement, defining it as an “an active, positive state of vigor, dedication and absorption” (p. 227). Work engagement concerns the way in which workers perceive their work as invigorating and challenging. For instance, something significant and meaningful to which they really feel like giving their time and effort (Bakker, 2014). It involves a great amount of physical and cognitive energy, as much as a clear focus and concentration on the work activity.

According to a Gallup poll (Rath & Harter, 2010b), a high percentage (73%) of workers in Brazil are disengaged or actively disengaged. It also indicates that low

engagement and low well-being are associated with low performance. Given this situation, positive leadership serves as a relevant strategy. Positive leadership is a concept developed for the Positive Coaching Methodology, and it proposes the use of coaching and positive psychology concepts and interventions for the development of leadership (Da Matta & Victoria, 2012). The theoretical support of positive leadership addresses concepts resulting from Positive Organizational Scholarship (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003) and Positive Organizational Behavior (Luthans, 2002). It includes, among other aspects, strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), engagement and flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

The positive leader has the ability to nourish the positive characteristics of their employees, providing opportunities for them to align their activities with their strengths and virtues (Da Matta & Victoria, 2012). In fact, workers who think of their leaders as caring are more likely to present high performance and less likely to be sick or quit their jobs (Rath & Harter, 2010b). Besides taking action to put into practice their concern about employee well-being, it is essential for leaders to keep measuring and following up, in order to teach workers how to manage their well-being over time.

Work engagement can be assessed through the nine-item version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9) by Schaufeli, Bakker and Salanova (2006). The scale presents items like “My job inspires me”, “At my job, I feel strong and vigorous” and “I am immersed in my work”. Items are scored on a 7-point rating scale ranging from 1 (never) to 7 (always/every day). The UWES-9 has been commonly used in research on work engagement (e.g., Balducci, Fraccaroli, & Schaufeli, 2010; Littman-Ovadia & Balducci, 2013; Schreurs, van Emmerik, van den Broeck, & Guenter, 2014).

### **Strengths and virtues.**

Seligman highlights that the state of flow demands the development of the highest strengths and virtues. Character strengths have been called the “foundation of the human

condition” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). It refers to the ability to provide consistent, near-perfect performance in a given activity (Clifton & Harter, 2003). For Peterson and Seligman (2004), it constitutes the psychological processes or mechanisms that comprise morally valued virtues.

Character strengths and virtues have been found to be universal across different cultures and belief systems (Dahlsgaard, Peterson, & Seligman, 2005; Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2006). Moreover, they have been identified in some of the most remote areas on the planet (Biswas-Diener, 2006). They represent the best qualities in people, reflecting their potential for reaching personal well-being and making a difference in the workplace and in the world around them (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). A growing interest has been observed in the study of character strengths and virtues as an influencing factor in well-being (Biswas-Diener, Kashdan, & Minhas, 2011; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Strengths and virtues seem to exert a relevant impact on people’s lives, being also crucial for the well-being of an entire society (Peterson & Park, 2009).

Fowers (2005) recognizes virtues as human excellences. The author addresses the importance of “virtues of character” or “the character strengths that make it possible for individuals to pursue their goals and ideals and to flourish as human beings” (p. 4) for accomplishing a good life. The concept of virtue involves elementary psychological aspects such as cognitions, affect, motivation, goals, behavior, relationships, communities and society, and brings these elements of life into an integrated whole (Fowers, 2005).

The study of personal virtues and strengths is part of one of the three pillars that underpins positive psychology (Seligman, 2002), whose primary aim is to focus on happiness. Specifically, positive psychology intends to increase our knowledge of what makes life most worth living through extensive and careful research on human strengths and virtues (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Seligman (2002) advocates that all individuals possess extraordinary strengths, and that authentic happiness is achieved by enhancing and nursing those strengths. The author mentions three different kinds of what one could take as a happy life: the pleasant life, the good/engaged life and the meaningful life. The first refers to a life of successfully pursuing pleasant emotion. In the second, you use your own particular strengths and virtues to conquer relevant gratifications and experience flow in activities you enjoy. Finally, the meaningful life consists of applying those strengths in service of something greater than yourself – the search for a higher purpose, such as religion, politics, family, environment, etc. (Seligman, 2002).

Undertaking activities that are congruent with one's strengths and virtues increases well-being in many ways, including more satisfaction with life, meaning and positive affect, and laying a foundation for people's greatest achievements (Lavy, Littman-Ovadia, & Bareli, 2014; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). In this context, the VIA Inventory of Character Strengths (VIA-IS) was created based on a compilation of virtues – morally valued character traits. It conceptualizes psychological strengths as universally valued traits that contribute to fulfillment and happiness (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). VIA-IS is a descriptive framework to help individuals discover, explore and use their strongest qualities, called character strengths. It consists of a free online assessment instrument that measures twenty-four universally-valued character strengths related to six virtues – wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance and transcendence (Niemiec, 2013).

In *Character Strengths and Virtues*, Peterson and Seligman (2004) document positive outcomes associated with each of the 24 VIA strengths and a number of important links between these character strengths and valued outcomes (e.g., life satisfaction, achievement). The VIA-IS highlights the best in people and focuses on the strengths of character that are relevant to optimal development during a lifetime (Park & Peterson, 2009). Peterson and



Seligman (2004) stress that although character strengths have been assumed to be somewhat general and stable, they are also shaped by individual environments and one must consider them to be capable of change (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

People who usually apply their strengths experience more subjective and psychological well-being (Govindji & Linley, 2007; Minhas, 2010). Additionally, they are more likely to accomplish their goals (Linley et al., 2010), are happier and present lower levels of depression (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). The research data on a wide range of areas indicate that strengths identification and use are promising tools for personal and organizational development (Biswas-Diener, Kashdan, & Minhas, 2011). Interventions like *Aware, Explore, Apply* (Niemiec, 2009) and *Strength-Spotting in Others* (Linley, 2012) are used in the identification, exercise and development of strengths. Biswas-Diener (2006) highlights that practitioners can make use of theory and research studies on strengths to develop psychology interventions in a wide variety of contexts, such as therapeutic, educational, organizational and coaching.

At the social level, the results of cultivating and using character strengths transcend their own reward, for the exercise of character strengths decreases the likelihood of distress and dysfunction (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). It furthers the growth of communities (Evans et al., 2011), contributing to aspects such as wealthy, respectful and supportive social connections and healthy communities (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

In the school environment, research involving the identification and development of students' strengths has shown evidence of growth, increased hope and self-confidence, besides declines in absenteeism and improved academic performance (Clifton & Harter, 2003). Moreover, research data indicate that strengths-based curricula are linked to enhance motivation and engagement in schools (Louis, 2009).

The application of strengths contributes positively to the psychological health and well-being of families (Conoley & Conoley, 2009). Durand and Hiernerman (2008) stress that it is necessary to consider the children's interests and difficulties but also their strengths, defending the notion that all young people possess the capacity to be successful and healthy. In this sense, Benson (1997) emphasizes that positive youth development is stimulated by the use and enhancement of strengths in families.

At the organizational environment, people who use their strengths at work experience less stress (Asplund, 2012). The cultivation of strengths and virtues in the workplace also promotes development on both the personal and professional level, through improved performance and greater strengths regulation – antidotes to demotivation and apathy (Evans et al., 2011). The cultivation of character strengths in the organizational environment is related to the well-being of everyone within the organization. According to the educational psychologist Donald Clifton, focusing on an individual's strengths encourages greater achievement and increased productivity by expanding talents, compared to focusing on the weaknesses of the individual (Clifton & Harter, 2003).

Performance and productivity are directly linked to the physical and psychological well-being of those involved. Satisfying, engaging and meaningful work seems to come from the use of one's character strengths in the professional setting rather than merely identifying them, and continued positive effects have been found for individuals who continue engaging in strengths-focused interventions (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005).

Clifton and Harter (2003) stress that the more a strength is exercised, the more integrated and the stronger it becomes. Peterson and Seligman (2004) submit that focusing on the development of character strengths may be more valuable and profitable than spending time focusing on individual distress that is already in place. Thus, a strengths-based approach

to building well-being on the individual and organization level can be more effective while conserving effort and financial resources.

For Clifton and Harter (2003), identification of talents helps to build an organization framework focusing on positive psychological potential. In this context, measurement and feedback are relevant in providing people with a solid position from which to realize their potential. Employees can then start to grow their awareness of their talents with knowledge and skills to develop strengths (Clifton & Harter, 2003). As the authors explain, this does not mean that organizations should ignore employees' weaknesses, but rather assume an optimization approach, in which strengths are highlighted and built upon, and weaknesses are comprehended and properly managed. Clifton and Harter (2003) defend that people and organizations can develop strengths by refining their talents with knowledge and skills. Also, an organization's potential grows as its employees have their talents identified, understood and integrated into their lives.

Clifton and Harter (2003) state that leaders who understand their own strengths and exercise leadership to engage people in the workplace massively contribute to building positive organizational environments. Based on the concept of Strengths-Based Leadership, Rath and Conchie (2009) present the Gallup Strengths Finder program and the StrengthsFinder assessment, which focus on strengths that can be used to accomplish success. Through interviews with thousands of executive teams, Gallup observed that the most tenacious and successful teams were well-balanced for they possessed leaders in each one of the broader categories of strengths: executing, influencing, relationship building and strategic thinking (Rath & Conchie, 2009).

Also at the research level, findings in business show that top-performing managers present a management style that targets the development of the strengths of the people they lead (Clifton & Harter, 2003). Organizations that have adopted a strengths-based approach to

employees' development have obtained expressive gains in enhancing performance and reducing turnover. In other words, managers who focus on employees' strengths have been highly successful in putting into practice a strategy that is psychologically more prolific by enhancing engagement and productivity through taking into account individual differences in their employees. Currently, evidence suggests that a strengths-based focus on development increase benefits such as school achievement, attendance, employee engagement, productivity and hope (Clifton & Harter, 2003).

### **Achievements, Goals and Objectives**

Defining goals and persevering to achieve them is a powerful part of planning an ideal future and motivating oneself to make this future a reality. This is one of the reasons why achievements, goals and objectives are integral elements of the SEMEAR acronym. Goals can be attained more easily when they are well-defined (Latham, 2003), are connected to values, purposes and personal strengths, and are pursued for self-concordant reasons (Kashdan & McKnight, 2009; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Sheldon, Kashdan, & Steger, 2011; Steger, 2012). Goal-directed action is critical in positive psychology and for human flourishing because of the crucial role it plays in connecting well-being to accomplishments in different realms of life (Kashdan & McKnight, 2009; Little & Grant, 2006; Locke, 2002; Sheldon, Kashdan, & Steger, 2011; Steger, 2012). Through our objectives, we adopt personal standards that influence our behavior and our beliefs on self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Maddux, 2002).

Goal-directedness is a characteristic that is common to all levels of life since all living organisms need to engage in actions aimed at attaining goals in order to survive (Binswanger, 1990; Locke, 2002). According to Sheldon and Elliot (1999), besides this basic instinct, it is natural to find satisfaction in using one's capacities to obtain desired outcomes. Thus, objectives can be defined as a means to turn values and dreams into reality (Locke, 2002),

ideal states towards which individuals strive (Messersmith & Schulenberg, 2010), or singular cognitive structures invested with motivational energy and a considerable degree of functional autonomy (Allport, 1961).

From a historical perspective, ever since human beings started to reflect more systematically on themselves, several theories that connect goals, purpose and values with needs, motivation and achievement have been formulated. Although Aristotle (384 B.C. – 322 B.C.) had already affirmed that having a purpose was essential for taking action, prior to the late 1960s, researchers paid little attention to goals and goal-setting (Locke & Latham, 2002). Finally, in 1968, American psychologist Edwin Locke released his renowned goal-setting theory, which he continued to study over the course of 25 years.

The goal-setting theory is based on the idea that “conscious goals affect action” (Locke & Latham, 2002, p. 705). One of the conclusions of Locke’s studies is that once a goal is accepted and understood, it stays on the periphery of the person’s consciousness as a reference to guide and give meaning to subsequent mental and physical actions (Locke, 2002). Humans set goals (or at least they can) volitionally through a reasoning process, and these goals may last for an entire lifetime, says the author. The theory is based on what Aristotle called causality – that is, action caused by a purpose.

Theories and empirical data suggest that the type of objective picked and the commitment to it are important determinants of whether an individual does what is necessary for goal attainment (Gollwitzer & Oettingen, 2011). Therefore, to concretize and take action to reach a goal, it must be SMART: “specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and have a time-frame” (Latham, 2003, p. 311).

Latham also identified a series of important points on the benefits of goal-setting. He postulated that goals are effective for introducing changes to behavior, as they are challenging and help to produce a sense of accomplishment. Also, goals can give meaning to

otherwise meaningless activities, make it more fun to complete tasks through competition, and help alleviate stress. However, in the absence of goal commitment, people are doomed to failure (Latham, 2003).

For a solid commitment to the goal, one must believe that it is both highly desirable and feasible. Desirability refers to beliefs about how pleasant the expected short-term and long-term consequences of goal attainment will be. Feasibility is defined as the expectation that future events and actions will, in fact, happen (Oettingen & Gollwitzer, 2010).

It is important to recognize, however, that strong goal commitment also depends on the cognitive and the motivational aspects of meaning. The former refers to a broad comprehension of one's role in life, and how one relates to the grand scheme of things (Steger, 2012). This understanding provides a firm basis for one's life experiences. The cognitive component, then, is connected to the motivational component in that it may form the foundation upon which people develop aspirations and identify the pursuits that provide their lives with a sense purpose and mission (Steger, 2012). The more the goals people develop are naturally connected to the unique ways they comprehend life, the more beneficial they are, says the author. This implies that the cognitive component drives the motivational one.

Therefore, the pursuit of self-concordant goals is a crucial part of developing purpose and meaning. Self-concordant goals are related to how a person's aspirations reflect their innermost values and interests (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999; Sheldon & Kasser, 1998). They are the epitome of self-determination (see Deci & Ryan, 2002) and are associated with greater effort and accomplishments over time. Factors that increase the probability of defining self-concordant goals and their successful pursuit are also relevant to purpose development (Kashdan & McKnight, 2009).

Thus, having self-concordant goals is one way to enhance well-being, especially when one employs signature strengths in such a pursuit (see Seligman, 2004). One way that individuals can improve their chances of obtaining positive results is by using these strengths to pursue their personal goals. In other words, personal strengths can be linked together with a self-concordant approach to objectives, since they are, by definition, connected to personal values and the expression of an integrated psychological core. Consequently, this association can lead to greater progress toward goals and a stronger sense of well-being and motivational reinforcement (Linley, Nielsen, Wood, Gillett, & Biswas-Diener, 2010).

For Little and Grant (2006), human flourishing and well-being are the results of the continuous pursuit of core and self-concordant personal projects. Since its inception, the personal projects perspective has been concerned with well-being, happiness and quality of life. Studies on individuals' assessments of their personal projects have consistently demonstrated that the relationships between personal projects and diverse measures of well-being are substantial. It seems reasonable to posit that well-being is positively related to the pursuit of personal projects that are deemed meaningful, manageable and supported (Little & Grant, 2006; Sheldon, Kashdan, & Steger, 2011).

This is why it is critical for people to first carefully choose goals and projects that are desirable and feasible, and then strive for them in an efficient manner. To carry out these two tasks, effective self-regulatory strategies exist, namely mental contrasting and implementation intentions (Oettingen & Gollwitzer, 2010).

Implementation intentions delegate control over the initiation of the intended goal-directed behavior by creating a strong link between a situational cue and a goal-directed response (Gollwitzer & Oettingen, 2011). Implementation intentions help people cope more efficiently with the major problems of goal striving: getting started, staying on track, taking a break and avoiding overexerting oneself. According to Oettingen and Gollwitzer (2010), in a

conscious and volitive way, individuals associate a certain key cue to an answer based on a specific goal (e.g., “If the situation X happens, then I’ll do Y”). This response, then, becomes automatically activated when the critical cue is activated.

For implementation intentions to be effective, strong goal commitments must be in place. Mental contrasting creates such commitments (Oettingen & Gollwitzer, 2010). It requires one to mentally elaborate first the positive future that will result from having resolved a given issue, and then, immediately afterward, the negative situation that will prevent the positive future from materializing. This helps people choose goal commitments based on their expectations of being successful. It also links future and present scenarios together, as it shows how the current situation stands in the way of achieving a desired future (Oettingen & Gollwitzer, 2010; Sevincer, Busatta, & Oettingen, 2014).

This process enables people to plan how to overcome obstacles and raises their awareness on which goals are attainable. In doing so, it gets people to pursue realistic goals and stay clear of unattainable ones (Gollwitzer & Oettingen, 2011; Oettingen & Gollwitzer, 2010). The authors explain that a mental contrasting with implementation intentions (MCII) intervention can be used to meet short-term as well as long-term goals.

Goal-setting, goal commitment and goal striving, therefore, are crucial elements for goal attainment. In order for these elements to function in a coordinated way, it is important for the goals to be connected with one’s values and purposes, have personal meaning and be of a self-concordant nature (Kashdan & McKnight, 2009; Sheldon, Kashdan, & Steger, 2011). Also, when helping people set goals, it is important to show them how to make SMART goals, instead of merely encouraging them “to do their best” (Latham, 2003).

However, goal-setting can be counterproductive if goals are set for the wrong outcome or if they are conflicted (Locke, Smith, Erez, Chah, & Shaffer, 1994). Goals that do not change when relevant circumstances do may produce undue rigidity. Concrete and



challenging goals defined in the absence of relevant expertise may lower the possibilities of establishing useful task strategies. When overly ambitious goals are set, it is easy to become disheartened. Overstretching people and discouraging them can be a risk. Also, goals can serve as a defensive ploy by people who do nothing to achieve their goals, but who are proud of their aspirations (Locke, 1996).

In this sense, interventions such as MCII can have positive implications for effective goal-setting and goal striving, as discussed by Oettingen and Gollwitzer (2010). These interventions may affect not only intrinsic motivation, which plays a pivotal role in goal-setting, and how self-determined the objectives can be (Deci & Ryan, 1985), but also an individual's perceived self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is defined as "people's belief in their capabilities to produce desired effects through their own actions" (Bandura, 1997, p. vii) or what people believe they can do using their skills under certain conditions (Maddux, 2002). When people have well-established objectives and core personal projects, and remain committed and motivated, well-being and human flourishing increase (Little & Grant, 2006).

In regards to measurements of the goal striving process, Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews and Kelly (2007) created the Grit Scale to measure one's level of perseverance and passion for long-term goals. This scale is based on a 12-item self-report questionnaire divided into two factors. The first factor contains six items indicating consistency of interests, and the second factor presents six items indicating perseverance of effort. The scale goes from the maximum 5 (extremely gritty) to the lowest 1 (not at all gritty). The primary goal for developing this scale was to identify the attitudes and behaviors that are typical of the high-achieving individuals interviewed for this research. Also, the Goal Adjustment Scale (GAS) is a tool developed by Wrosch, Scheier, Miller, Schulz and Carver (2003) that measures reaction to life goal adjustments. The scale consists of 10 statements that complete the

following hypothesis: “If I have to stop pursuing an important goal in my life”. Each one is given a rating of 1 (“strongly agree”) to 5 (“strongly disagree”).

Nevertheless, the field of studies on goal-setting and goal striving shows us that, regardless of the context, it is common for promotion, learning and intrinsic goals to be more successfully reached than prevention, performance and external ones (Oettingen & Gollwitzer, 2010). The well-being associated with achieving these objectives can be experienced in various contexts in distinct ways.

In the fields of parenting and formal education, for instance, parents, teachers and students can benefit to the extent that goals and goal-setting have a reciprocal relationship with high self-efficacy (Duncan, Dufrene, Sterling, & Tingstrom, 2013; Locke & Latham, 2002). Students are likely to feel more efficient and competent in many of the daily activities in which they engage during the period of study (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999).

Goal-setting is also important for experiencing flow. Learning to set effective goals can help people achieve the focus they need. As the organizational field involves identifying clear targets, deadlines and quality standards to be met, it is the most favorable environment for flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Thus, setting and pursuing goals can improve performance in the workplace. When this optimized state of intrinsic motivation occurs, strengths and talents are used and people feel satisfied with their work and performance (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Through goal-setting, employees gain confidence and become responsible for their work, they share a common standard of performance to aim for, and it gives them a clear understanding of what is expected of them (Pritchard, Roth, Jones, Galgay, & Watson, 1988).

Furthermore, in the community sphere, those pursuing goals for self-concordant reasons tend to have stronger feelings of relatedness to others. As many self-concordant goals involve helping others or the community, or both, those who pursue and achieve such goals are likely to feel satisfaction from connecting with others routinely (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999).

## **Relationships and Interactions**

In good part, we are defined by the relationships that we establish in a given environment. Positive relationships exert a relevant impact on happiness (see Gable & Gosnell, 2011). They affect psychological and physical health (e.g., Bolger & Ecknrode, 1991; Haidt, 2006) and are an essential element for the enhancement of well-being (Peterson, 2006; Rath & Harter, 2010b) and cultivation of flourishing (Seligman, 2011). Our relations with others are one of the factors that determine the quality of our lives (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Given their importance to well-being and flourishing, relationships were included as one of the components of the SEMEAR project. They are also one of the elements in the SEMEAR acronym, and will be addressed below in terms of their relevance, association with well-being and contribution to the flourishing of individuals and communities.

Over the course of human evolution, organization in groups has favored our survival as a species, to such an extent that we have become biologically social organisms (Wilson & Wilson, 2007). According to Peterson (2006), human biology shows that the role of our relationships with others far exceeds a simple means to obtain food, sex or other primary reinforcers. In fact, consistent and constructive social interactions improve the immunological system, speed up the recovery of the organism (after surgery, for example), reduce the risks of depression and anxiety disorders (Haidt, 2006) and are directly related to happiness and satisfaction (Diener & Seligman, 2002).

In contrast, a deficiency in the sphere of relationships between individuals – an absence of strong emotional bonds or even social isolation – is related to a substantial impact on health and an increase in risk of death (House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988). This highlights that consolidating and maintaining positive personal relationships constitute a critical component of health and well-being (Gable & Gosnell, 2011).

Haidt (2006) points out that, as social beings, our happiness is inexorably linked to the bonds established with those closest to us. Directly or indirectly, other people are involved in our pleasures and celebrations, as well as in the way we enjoy them (Peterson, 2006). Fowler and Christakis (2008) assert that a person's happiness depends, among various other factors, on the happiness of people emotionally closest to them. Based on their study, the researchers also claim that the more connected to a network of friends or family, the greater the chances are that an individual will achieve happiness in the future.

According to a Gallup poll, only 30% of people have a close friend in the workplace. These employees are significantly more likely to be engaged, have greater well-being and better performance (Rath & Harter, 2010b). Positive relationships contribute to a healthier life, well-being and even engagement at work, while their absence can increase loneliness and depression, explain Rath and Harter (2010b).

At the start of life, our well-being necessarily depends on a caregiver and on the emotional relationship they establish with us to assure our survival (Mellen, 1981). The human baby has an evolutionary predisposition to attend to the most important stimulus of its environment: the mother (or caregiver), who in turn is attracted by the responsiveness of the infant (Peterson, 2006). Nevertheless, well-being stemming from the emotional bond built between this dyad goes beyond the mere satisfaction of the basic needs of the infant. This is also valid for other mammals, as demonstrated by the pioneering studies of Harlow (1958) with primates.

The relationship between well-being and social interactions may be observed in attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980). Attachment theory states that attachment favors the survival of the infant by regulating the relationship with its caregiver. Secure attachment contributes to the development of autonomy and social skills, making us more able to form healthy bonds with others. It is also closely associated with quality of life and

well-being (Peterson, 2006). According to Bowlby (1979), the attachment system operates from the start until the end of our lives. As adults, our loving relationships are built based on two ancient and integrated systems: an attachment system that bonds infant to mother and a caregiving system that bonds mother to infant (Haidt, 2006).

Individual survival depends on the survival of the group; our evolution as a species is closely linked to group selection (Wilson & Wilson, 2007). Baumeister and Leary (1995) advocate that humans have an innate need to establish and keep a minimum quantity and quality of interpersonal relationships, and that long-term relationships provide a sense of belonging. The need to belong apparently has an evolutionary basis, for a tendency to form and maintain social relationships facilitates the survival of the species (Ainsworth, 1989; Axelrod & Hamilton, 1981).

Establishing social relations can help enhance positive emotions, and it is not merely a desire as much as a human need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). In fact, the number and quality of close relationships are consistently related to happiness (Argyle, 2001; Demir, 2013; Myers, 2000; Rath & Harter, 2010b). Our necessity to connect to other people begins when we are born and stays with us throughout our lives. In fact, people usually mention close relationships as the most meaningful aspect of their lives (Sears, 1977).

Meanwhile, any threats to these bonds cause a series of negative emotional states. Baumeister and Leary (1995) also highlight that belongingness deficits presumably produce a series of health issues. Studies concerning social support routinely associate it with well-being (Gable & Gosnell, 2011). Perceived support, the perception that people will come to one's aid if required (Vangelisti, 2009), is in fact strongly linked to positive health (Kaul & Lakey, 2003; Smith, Ruiz, & Uchino, 2004).

Deci et al. (2006) investigated autonomy support within close friendships. Autonomy support concerns the process in which one relational partner acknowledges the other's

perspective, offering choice, stimulating self-initiation and being responsive to the other (Deci et al., 2006). Results showed that perceived autonomy support from a friend also predicted the subject's psychological health, a greater experience of positive affect and a lower experience of negative affect (Deci et al., 2006). Hence, the authors indicate that the replicated finding of positive associations between autonomy support and both psychological experience and well-being also include close-friend peer relations.

Research data also supports that by practicing capitalization – sharing the news of a positive event with others (Langston, 1994) – individuals experienced positive affect above and beyond the event itself (Gable, Reis, Impett, & Asher, 2004; Langston, 1994). However, those effects depend significantly on the reactions of people with whom the good news is shared (Gable et al., 2004). Gable, Gonzaga and Strachman (2006) point out that the targets of capitalization are usually people with whom the individual has a close relationship. The authors explain that by sharing positive events with close ones, individuals are sharing their strengths, and perceiving that a loved person validates a strength can massively benefit one's sense of self-worth.

According to Gable and Gosnell (2011), tangible and emotional support during stress events is one of the reasons why emotional bonds are so closely related to health and well-being. Love, gratitude and, once again, capitalization are also identified by the authors as highly relevant factors for increasing well-being through relationships. In this sense, happiness is more than a function of one's experience; it is also a property shared by a group of people (Fowler & Christakis, 2008). People do not keep emotions to themselves, they tend to express them, and like laughter and smiling, happiness might contribute to an adaptive purpose of strengthening social bonds (Gervais & Wilson, 2005). Reis and Gable (2003) underline that relationships present a functional context that affects many basic psychological processes, and that relationship benefits affect more than just mental health. Successful

relationships are crucial to positive experiences in all areas and environments of life, including communities, schools, families and corporations.

For Prilleltensky (2011), an individual's well-being is highly dependent on the well-being of their relationships and of the community where they live. Community well-being refers to the quality of the relationships and the cohesion among its citizens (Block, 2009), and it affects personal and family life (Prilleltensky, 2011). In other words, individuals and communities flourish at the same time, nourishing each other (Prilleltensky, 2011).

Concerning educational environments, students' success at school is linked to their relationships with others and also to the promotion of different kinds of relationships by the educational environment (Patrick & Ryan, 2005). Waters (2011) states that improvements in well-being are likely to produce increases in learning, which is the major goal of education.

According to Waters (2011), Seligman's (2011) PERMA is an appropriate framework to encourage positive education in institutions. And positive relationships are the third element that composes the acronym PERMA (Seligman, 2011). In the experimental field, relationships are one of the components evaluated by the PERMA-Profiler, the multidimensional gauge of flourishing that assesses the five elements of PERMA (Butler & Kern, 2013).

Relationships are also crucial for the emotional health of families. Vangelisti (2004) emphasizes that families are built and maintained through social interaction. Close family members provide for most of our early socialization experiences (Vangelisti, 2004). It is by observing family relationships and being part of it that most people learn how to interact with others (Bruner, 1990). Social relationships, especially intimate relationships, have important effects on happiness (e.g., Diener & Seligman, 2002). Although the effects of objective relationship variables are relatively small, the role of relationship quality in happiness is considerably greater (Saphire-Bernstein & Taylor, 2013).

On the corporate level, the health of an organization depends on the emotional aspect, in relation to a climate of acceptance, appreciation and affirmation among its employees (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2006). Warr (1999) stresses that a sense of security and respect contributes to the well-being of employees. As such, when the emotional needs of workers are neglected, their level of satisfaction and performance quality are negatively affected (Prilleltensky, 2011).

Lewis (2011) explains that positive relationships have sizable effects in the workplace, since they are associated with better career mobility, more access to mentoring and other organizational resources. The healthy expression of emotions, resilience, faster recovery from difficulties, stronger positive meaning, more development and growth are some other relevant contributions of positive relationships in organizations.

Relationships are crucial for stimulating transformation and increasing well-being in business. Interpersonal connections may be considered networks through which results and development are obtained. In this context, high-quality connections consist of interactions that are constructive for both of the connected individuals (Dutton, 2003). They are also related to individual and organizational outcomes (Stephens, Heaphy, & Dutton, 2011).

Learning to improve our relationships and turn them into flow experiences can exponentially increase our happiness and life satisfaction (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). In order to enhance our relationships and our social well-being, Rath and Harter (2010b) recommend spending more time every day socializing with colleagues, friends and family. They also mention bolstering the reciprocal connections in our networks and combining social activities with physical activities, such as going to the gym with a friend.

Moreover, by thinking and acting more positively, people may enhance their relationships, creating deeper and more solid ties (Fredrickson, 2009b). Offering authentic



and enthusiastic support and exercising assertive communication in our interactions with other people also contributes to enhancing relationships (Seligman, 2011).

Our happiness may have a lot to do with people who are close to us (Fowler & Christakis, 2008). We live in small groups: family, friends, work colleagues; we play, we pray, we celebrate and grieve in groups (Peterson, 2006). We depend on others to be happy. Whether in loving relationships, in every singular bond with a close one or in relationships we form with the groups of which we are part, it is the amount of these relationships that provides us with fulfillment and flourishing. We are immersed in our relationship networks, and the health and well-being of these relationships affects our own health and well-being (Fowler & Christakis, 2008). Peterson (2006), when addressing positive psychology, accurately sums up the argument defended in this paper when he states: “Other people matter” (p. 249).

#### **Part IV – Change Proposal**

##### **Coaching, Positive Psychology and Philanthropy for Social Change**

An essential premise guiding the SEMEAR Project is the notion that coaching can act as a powerful propeller for social change. One way to understand this premise is the observation that, through coaching, the quality of interaction between individuals can shift (O’Connor & Cavanagh, 2013). If we see social change in a broader sense – as a transformation of consciousness and of the quality and purpose of relationships between individuals in society (Giri, 2005) – then we can start to envision the potential role of coaching as a facilitating process to foster this transformation. Change is at the heart of coaching, and this view is expressed by many of its definitions: coaching is above all about human growth and change (Stober, 2006); coaching is a vigorous tool for changing people’s lives (Biswas-Diener & Dean, 2007); or, even, the aim of coaching is to promote lasting cognitive, emotional and behavioral change (Douglas & McCauley, 1999). Coaches are

midwives at the birth of a new social order, says Whitmore (2009), and Brock (2008) goes even further by describing coaching itself as a social movement, open and fluid, which spreads through human relationships and interactions.

Propelled by coaching, the change process that starts with one person can produce a ripple effect that goes far beyond the individual level. Applying Complex Adaptive System theory (Eidleson, 1997), that explains the complexity of behavior beyond individual level, and Social Networking Analysis (Scott, 2000), that explores relational data in complex adaptive systems, to the analysis of systemic change of organizational culture promoted by coaching, O'Connor and Cavanagh (2013) concluded that the coaching ripple effect does appear to take place. When a system changes, leaders and other agents adjust to new information. Each agent expands their behavioral repertoire, and, in doing so, the behavioral repertoire of the system is also expanded (Kauffman, 1993).

If coaching's ripple effect can propagate through organizations, the next questions are: could it propagate through even larger and more complex systems? If the answer is yes, would it have the potential to stimulate social change? Evidence from several academic studies and field projects suggests that the chances of it happening would be increased by the combined strengths of coaching and positive psychology. Coaching is a social phenomenon and a multidisciplinary field that, to be sustainable, should continue its rapid innovation (Brock, 2008). Based on my experience of more than 20 years as a coaching trainer, researcher and writer, I don't think it would be an overstatement to say that the advent of positive psychology and its application in coaching is probably the most important innovation coaching has gone through in the last decade. This view is supported by many experts who have also detected the amplified potential unleashed when both disciplines join forces. For Grant and Cavanagh (2007), coaching offers a possible platform for applied positive psychology and for facilitating individual, organizational and social change. The word

potential is mentioned once again by Biswas-Diener and Dean (2007) when they affirm that positive psychology shows tremendous potential as a natural interface with the profession of coaching. According to the authors, there are two ways positive psychology can boost coaching efficacy. The first is related to the sophisticated scientific methodology that supports positive psychology, which can offer an answer to the call for an increased role of research in coaching. The second is the fact that, as an applied science, positive psychology provides theories, interventions and assessments that constitute an important addition to current coaching tools.

### **Social capital and group level empowerment.**

Coaching also has a contribution to make to positive psychology. Commenting on Seligman's call for positive psychologists to take an active attitude in improving quality of life for the world's population, Biswas-Diener (2011) observes that there is an increasing understanding that positive psychology cannot simply be about individual happiness. To fulfill its potential, positive psychology should shift towards group interventions targeting families, workplaces and communities. It should also pursue other desirable outcomes, such as increased social capital or group level empowerment (Biswas-Diener & Patterson, 2011). This change in focus is necessary to avoid the trap expressed by Block (2009) when he warns us that the transformation of large numbers of individuals does not result in the transformation of communities. His warning is about individualistic approaches that do not take into consideration a more sophisticated point of view where personal, organizational and community well-being are seen as part of a web of wellness, in which a change in one affects the others, and an improvement in one increases the chances of improvement in others (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2006).

Community's well-being is related to the quality of the relationships that exist among its citizens (Block, 2009), which is the essence of what is called social capital, defined as "the

aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition” (Bourdieu, 1983, p. 248). Alternatively, as Block (2009) asserts, it is about acting on and valuing our interdependence and sense of belonging.

As I have already stated, there is an urgent call for positive psychology to shift from its rather individualistic focus, which would require us to embrace individual, organizational and community change as a whole process that could generate more social capital – and more well-being to elevate quality of life for larger populations. Here, coaching has a valuable contribution to make. Coaching’s ripple effect combined with the concept of community of practice – comprised by individuals engaged in a process of group learning in a shared area of human endeavor (Wenger, 2011) – can increase social capital. A study conducted by Stelter, Nielsen and Wikman (2011) collected evidence to show that group coaching promotes social recovery (the return to better social functioning) as a result of collaborative meaning-making (meanings that provide a basis for cultural exchange) in communities of practice. Social recovery and collaborative meaning-making, in turn, lead to the accumulation of social capital. More social capital means that people living in society can cooperate more successfully and have a greater sense of social integration and satisfaction (Block, 2009).

Another essential element for social change is group level empowerment, which should also be a desirable outcome pursued by positive psychology (Biswas-Diener & Patterson, 2011). Moreover, in this aspect too, coaching could provide a real help. To empower someone means to strengthen one’s belief in their own personal power (Conger & Canungo, 1988). An empowered person experiences a greater sense of impact, competence, meaningfulness and choice (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). That is why empowered people are willing to give more of themselves and take calculated risks for change (Spreitzer & Quinn, 1992). This is another desirable outcome that can be produced by coaching. After measuring

the levels of psychological empowerment among leaders being coached and their coachees, it was found that psychological empowerment levels significantly increased after executive coaching, which confirms a flow-on effect (Allan, 2011). Also, the empowering behaviors of leaders positively affect psychological empowerment with their team members (Konczak, Stelly, & Trusty, 2000).

Finally, another aspect that needs to be considered is the relationship between positive psychology and power structures that perpetuate inequality and injustice and, by doing so, contribute to suffering. Davies (2015) sees this relationship under a critical light. From his point of view, happiness science is a critique turned inwards, and concerns with subjective well-being divert our attention from the world around us and its broader political and economic problems – like the ones the SEMEAR Project intends to tackle. However, this is a risk which many positive psychologists have already foreseen, and are already working to avoid. Prilleltensky (2011), for instance, has shed light on how different types of justice influence well-being, including at the community level, which, of course, cannot occur if we don't pay attention to the world around us.

Positive psychology is a science in progress, and many of its concepts and constructs are being constantly reviewed and expanded. One of its cornerstones – well-being – is now seen as a multidimensional construct that focuses not only on happiness and life-satisfaction. Other aspects can also be considered in well-being measurements (Benjamin, Cunningham, Heffetz, Kimball, & Szembrot, 2015; Benjamin, Heffetz, Kimball, & Szembrot, 2014). These aspects include freedom from corruption, injustice and abuse of power; the morality, ethics and goodness of people in our nation; the help our society gives to the poor and others who struggle; the sense of security about life and the future; among others. All of them direct our attention towards political, economic and social problems, and also towards what is behind it

– the power structures that perpetuate inequality and injustice. Being aware of this and being aware of our relationship with it is a fundamental step towards change.

### **Philanthropy for self-actualization.**

There are several other ways in which coaching and positive psychology could join forces to facilitate positive change. In the previous sections of this capstone, I demonstrated how the elements expressed by the SEMEAR acronym – all of them based on a combination of a coaching structure and positive psychology concepts – can help generate the collective synergy that promotes holistic wellness. This notion was defined by Prilleltensky and Prilleltensky (2006) as an approach to wellness built on personal, organizational and community change that promotes personal, organizational and community well-being at the same time.

However, from the point of view of the SEMEAR Project, the core of this approach is to help people to acquire tools to fulfill their basic needs and to become self-actualizers. Commenting on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Whitmore (2009) observes that the primary quest of self-actualizers – people who seek to fulfill their need for self-actualization – is to find meaning and purpose in their lives. In other words, they want their work, their activities and their existence to have some value, to be a contribution to others. Philanthropy – which, aligned with coaching and positive psychology, constitutes one of the three pillars of the SEMEAR Project – could be a vehicle to fulfill this need. Based on Whitmore's comments, it is possible to say that the more self-actualized a person is, the stronger his or her drive will be towards contribution. The contribution could take many forms – from the coaches who work voluntarily to spread the SEMEAR Project across the nation to the parents, teachers and leaders who feel impelled to use what they have learned to stimulate change within their families, schools, organizations and communities. The definition of philanthropy as a “voluntary giving and association that serves to promote human flourishing” (Ealy, 2005,

p.2) gives it a new vision that can certainly communicate with coaching and positive psychology. According to Ealy, there is an intersection between the psychological pursuit of happiness and the philanthropic impulse toward benevolence. The crucial psychological factor to achieve our happiness, says the author, as well as the humanitarian imperative to cultivate the happiness of people on a global level, is achieving ever new heights. This was also observed by Whitmore (2009), when he detected emerging altruistic tendencies through which more and more people are demonstrating that they care as much about fairness and the plight of others as they do about themselves – which is very positive, not only for the givers but also for the receivers. A great deal of studies in psychology has examined how helping others can affect well-being. There is a correlation between the benefits enjoyed by those who are the target of philanthropic actions on one hand, and, on the other, the ones received by those who act generously and altruistically towards others (Piliavin, 2003). This behavior can be traced to the inherently rewarding experience of generating large-scale social cooperation that has allowed human groups to thrive (Aknin, et al., 2013; Payton & Moody, 2008; Piliavin, 2003).

The motivation for altruism and philanthropy are what is known as “virtuous actions”, which, according to Aristotelian philosophy, can be succinctly explained as conscious and voluntary activities that are intended for the greater good and express human excellence. In the literature on positive psychology, virtuous actions are activities that promote full engagement, the use of one’s strengths and total occupation of one’s attention (Garnett, Jr., 2008).

Seligman (2002) asserts that positive emotions last longer when we are engaged in actions that pose a challenge and, at the same time, increase our sense of contribution and level of well-being. This runs counter to the well-known idea that purely pleasurable activities are more satisfactory and rewarding than philanthropic actions, which implies a distinction

between philanthropic actions and activities that are “fun” (Garnett, Jr., 2008; Seligman, 2002). In fact, studies indicate that we are happier when we contribute positively to other people’s lives than when we exclusively pursue personal gratification. One finds one’s “better self” when one takes a step back and concentrates on other people (Seligman, 2002).

As stated by Midlarsky (1991), helping others can benefit the helper in five ways: (a) by providing a distraction from one’s own problems, (b) by raising the sense of meaningfulness and value in one’s own life, (c) by having a positive effect on self-evaluations, (d) by enhancing positive moods, and (e) through better social integration based on social skills and interpersonal relationships.

The etymological origin of “philanthropy” is the Greek word *philanthropia*, which means “love of mankind”. In some of its modern uses, philanthropy still retains its ancient meaning of general benevolence, kindness and generosity toward humanity (Payton & Moody, 2008). In the present day, the principal motives for engaging in philanthropic action are stewardship and the belief in the need to take social responsibility for the well-being of society as a whole, which imply long-term commitments to improving the welfare of others and society in general (Schuyt, Smit, & Bekkers, 2013). Thus, this kind of social action represents a bridge between individual and collective concerns. It is a way for people to connect their interests to those of others, bond with their communities and engage with the larger society (Snyder, 2009), always through initiatives of individuals and groups for which there is no obligation to become involved (Snyder, 2009).

Supported by coaching, positive psychology and philanthropy, the SEMEAR Project aims to facilitate this change by embracing the challenge proposed by Whitmore (2009), when he calls on coaches to take their responsibility and help others to do the same. That is how, in his view, we can play our part in the building of a better world for all. The SEMEAR



Project intends to answer this call, inviting and preparing Brazilian coaches to embrace the challenge to promote flourishing throughout the country.

### **Sustainable change.**

The SEMEAR Project was designed to promote lasting change towards flourishing, increasing the well-being of individuals, organizations and communities. Sustainable change can happen at all levels of human interaction, on a scale ranging from individuals to teams to organizations to communities, countries and the globe (Boyatzis, 2006). However, exploring the factors that facilitate change is essential when individuals and organizations attempt to undergo a purposeful change process (Westing, Friedman, & Thompson-Westra, 2015). In this literature review, several factors have emerged as relevant tools to facilitate change. Five of them emerge due to their fundamental role in the change process. As we will see, all of them were taken into consideration by the SEMEAR Project. The five outstanding factors are: 1) Psychosocial prosperity; 2) Intentional change and my ideal self; 3) Leaders who can build the future; 4) Appreciative Inquiry; and 5) Coaching.

#### ***1. Psychosocial prosperity.***

“Monitoring psychosocial prosperity will be the first step in instituting social change” (Diener & Diener, 2011, p. 53). This conclusion was reached by the authors after the data analysis of the Gallup World Poll, an ongoing global survey initiated in 2005. Representing 98% of world’s population, the poll is considered the first accurate data on how humanity feels about life (Diener & Tov, 2009), which lead us to the concept of psychological prosperity. This construct is the sum of social prosperity (composed of social support; public trust; safety and security; and tolerance) and psychological prosperity (a combination of competence and growth; positive evaluation of life and life satisfaction; positive engagement; and low levels of chronic negative feelings), totaling eight variables. By studying the Gallup World Poll, Diener and Diener (2011) discovered that the eight psychosocial prosperity

variables correlated with each other at the societal level, which supports a broader concept of well-being where the objective circumstances of a person are amalgamated with their subjective perception of their condition. It also underlines the notion that well-being is not only an outcome but a condition of being originated from the dynamic interaction of results and processes (McGregor, 2006).

Diener and Diener (2011) argue for a definition of development that may be seen as a utopia by many but is perfectly tuned with the SEMEAR Project. They define development as the creation of conditions where all people in the world can achieve well-being. The nature of these conditions requires higher levels of psychological prosperity, which is as important as economic prosperity in defining flourishing (Diener & Tay, 2011). The eight elements of psychosocial prosperity are desirable in all cultures of the world. If an intolerant society, with corruption, crime and lack of social support will not flourish, then a society in which its citizens are incompetent in their skills and in reaching their goals, and experience more anger and depression than joy and contentment will not flourish either (Diener & Diener, 2011). These observations suggest a close relationship between higher levels of psychological prosperity and the proper conditions for flourishing, indicating why monitoring psychosocial prosperity is a major factor for change. This view provided a crucial support to ground the SEMEAR Project's aims and strategies in solid research about what flourishing could mean at a global level – and in which direction we need to change to achieve it.

## ***2. Intentional change and my ideal self.***

Based on his extensive analysis of culture, development and social theory, Clammer realized that “intentional change [...] is the key to be able to steer social processes in desirable directions, desirable in the sense of more equal, more just and more environmentally responsible” (Clammer, 2012, p. 245). This conclusion leads us towards the Intentional Change Theory, or ICT (Boyatzis, 2006), as a change model that will permeate

every SEMEAR Project initiative. A good example of how it could be done is found in the Positive Coaching Methodology (Da Matta & Victoria, 2012), which is the basis of the positive coaching training I developed and implemented in Brazil.

The Positive Coaching Methodology has as its starting point the ICT claim that change processes are affected by the person's will, values and motivations – the reason why most, if not all, sustainable behavioral change is intentional. Change in a desired way – the desired direction advocated by Clammer – requires deliberate efforts. Boyatzis (2006) tells us that teams, organizations, communities and even countries can change in desired ways. However, without intentional efforts, change can be slow or may result in unintentional harmful consequences. According to Boyatzis, an intentional change process must begin with a person wanting to change. The problem is that this desire may not be in their consciousness or even within the scope of their self-awareness – and here, again, coaching can help. To raise awareness – another key aspect of the Positive Coaching Methodology (Da Matta & Victoria, 2012) – is a coach's function that Whitmore (2009) considers indispensable. At least until the coachee develops the skill of self-coaching, which, in Whitmore's words, opens the door to continuous self-improvement and self-discovery.

Desired, sustainable change within a family, team, organization, country or even the global level occurs when the ideal self – the discovery of whom we want to be – becomes a shared vision of the future (Boyatzis, 2006). The next steps, or discoveries, proposed by Boyatzis include the real self and its comparison with the ideal self; a learning agenda and a plan; experimentation and practice with the new behavior; and trusting relationships that can help us in each step of the process.

### ***3. Leaders who can build the future.***

A leader can enable individuals to consider an intentional change. Without leadership there does not seem to be an emergence of desired, sustainable change (Boyatzis, 2006). That

is why the SEMEAR Project seeks to identify the combination of individuals who would have the most influence through their connectivity, which could be the best way to produce maximum benefit for the well-being of all the people in the system (O'Connor & Cavanagh, 2013). These individuals could be developed through coaching and positive psychology. To investigate how coaching is making a difference in organizations and society, Rostron (2011) talked to coaches, teachers, leaders and individuals from many different perspectives. All of them conceived the potential of positive psychology and coaching as possessing the capacity to form qualified leaders to build the future of the world (Biswas-Diener, 2011).

With the Positive Coaching Methodology, we are already training in Brazil those leaders who – we hope – can build the future. The methodology encompasses the concept of positive leadership, which is based – among other theories – on the ICT, especially in the emotional attractors described by Boyatzis (Da Matta & Victoria, 2012).

The Positive Emotional Attractor (PEA) arouses the parasympathetic nervous system, giving the person more access to their neural circuits and making them more susceptible to experience neurogenesis (conversion of hippocampal stem cells into new neurons), so new degrees of learning become possible. The negative emotional attractor (NEA) arouses the sympathetic nervous system, pushing the person towards a defensive state, closing down non-essential neural circuits and producing cortisol, which inhibits or even stops neurogenesis (Boyatzis, 2006). Boyatzis also asserts that leaders can stimulate the PEA when they appeal to the ideal self, share a positive and engaging vision, turn their focus to a desired future and convey a message of hope.

This can have a considerable impact on the change process. In a very inspiring study, Howard and Coombe (2006) examined how desired change occurs at the national or cultural level. They analyzed the actions and the words of two key figures of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States and the Anti-Apartheid Movement in South Africa – Martin

Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela – through the light of ICT. Speeches by King and Mandela (selected at critical points in the change movement) were coded by the authors to establish the ratio of PEA to NEA. Statements with content regarding hope, vision, strengths, possibilities and desired future were coded as PEA markers – and the opposite content as NEA markers. The results showed that both King’s and Mandela’s speeches were grounded in the Positive Emotional Attractor (PEA), and both leaders pointed to the ideal self / ideal nation. The findings suggest that, at a time of national change, great leaders appeal to the PEA to articulate a shared ideal or a national vision (Howard & Coombe, 2006).

Such studies provide fundamental insights into the processes that lead to sustainable change – at the individual, organizational and social levels.

#### ***4. Appreciative Inquiry.***

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) can be defined as a cooperative search for the best in people, their organizations and the world. It involves the systematic identification of aspects that give life to an organization or community (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). According to the authors, AI promotes a shift from problem analysis to positive core (or strengths) analysis, which lies at the heart of positive change. Its methods, tools and insights have helped not only several companies around the world, but also the United Nations Global Compact – a sustainability initiative designed to align strategies and operations with universal principles of human rights and take actions that advance societal goals (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008).

For the SEMEAR Project, an AI Summit represents a unique opportunity to attract volunteers within the community of more than 15 thousand coaches trained by the Brazilian Coaching Society. It is also an opportunity to introduce them to the foundation and invite them to share this dream with us, to amplify it and make it their own. As was pointed out by Fry in the foreword to the book *Appreciative Inquiry Handbook for Leaders of Change*

(Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008), AI is about bringing out the best in people, stimulating them to imagine and to build together a preferred – and shared – future that is more hopeful, boundless and inherently good. During the Summit, the coaches would be invited to explore their values, their strengths and their missions, and to bring to the surface the dreams and desires that led them to the coaching profession. The discoveries that would emerge from this experience could be interlaced with another exploration – this one about the future they dream for themselves, for their children, companies, communities and country. Next, we would explore how this dream can come true, and how the foundation could be their vehicle and their support to accomplish this task.

### ***5. Coaching.***

Sustainable change is not easy to achieve. Research from behavioral change literature shows that relapse rates can be as high as 80% (Cockburn, 2004). Nevertheless, studies conducted in two different niches of coaching – executive and wellness – suggest that coaching can help reduce these rates. Executive coaching is a process that helps executives deal with change and reach organizational or work-related goals (Goldsmith, 2009). In one study, percentages about executive coaching effectiveness ranging from 70.7% to 93.8% suggested that coaching contributed to sustained behavioral change (Genger, 1997). In yet another study, sustained behavioral change was mentioned by 63% of the participants as one of the main indications of successful coaching (Wasylyshyn, 2003).

The increasing popularity of positive psychology is shedding light on health or wellness coaching – a niche focused in a conscious and deliberate process whereby a person makes choices for a healthier and more satisfying lifestyle (Swarbrick, 1997, 2006). In their study about coaching and behavior change, Frates, Moore, Lopez and McMahon (2011) observed that behavior modification is crucial to the prevention or amelioration of lifestyle-related disease. They also emphasize the conclusion that health and wellness coaching is

emerging as a powerful intervention for sustainable change because it builds the psychological skills needed to support lasting change.

To understand the reasons why coaching can be such an effective intervention for sustainable change, some fundamental principles about the changing process should be considered. Pratt and Bowman (2008) sustain that, according to psychological and educational research, behavioral change is sustained when interventions comprise principles of behavior change. One of these principles was pointed out by Cockburn (2004) when she affirmed that the most successful interventions are grounded on a coherent comprehension of target behaviors. Helping the client to establish specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely goals is one of the coach's main tasks (Da Matta & Victoria, 2011). This view is also shared by Grant (2012), who observed that, when coaches understand the different types of goals and their relationship to the process of change, they can work more efficiently with their clients, helping them to achieve behavioral change.

Another relevant principle of sustained behavior change is to build specific behavioral skills and practice the desired behavior. New knowledge provides the groundwork for new behaviors. However, behavioral change is more likely to occur when skills are taught, practiced and rewarded over time (Pratt & Bowman, 2008). To develop new skills and improve performance is the aim of skills and performance coaching, broadly defined as "assisting someone to learn how to do something better" (Tschannen-Moran, 2010, p. 203). Skills and performance improvements require practice and coaching is a process that helps people to persevere while implementing new behaviors. Under this point of view, the role of coaching is to promote the necessary alignment between internal understandings and external environments, in order to facilitate the process by which the coaches can make adaptive choices and sustain new behaviors (Tschannen-Moran, 2010).

Coaching also emphasizes practice because it is an essential element through which a person can develop self-generative capacity. This ability is described by Silsbee (2008) as a combination of autonomy and agency that enable us to take creative and efficient actions that further our development. In other words, it is the ability to generate new actions and possibilities that lead to a new and expanded self. A new self is expressed by new behaviors that can be sustained over time. The oriented, guided practice offered by coaching is a central aspect of this process because “when we practice a new behavior, first it becomes increasingly available to us, and eventually it becomes our new default” (Silsbee, 2008, p. 61).

### **Change and positive interventions.**

Positive interventions, delivered through the coaching process, are the tools by which the SEMEAR Project will stimulate change towards flourishing and well-being. Positive interventions aim to increase happiness and the quality of human life (Diener, 2009; Parks & Schueller, 2014). Albeit this definition may sound conclusive, it is just one trigger in a broad theoretical and practical discussion that aims to contextualize what “interventions” really are and what gives them the quality of being “positive”. This discussion demonstrates the prominence that positive interventions have been acquiring in society, as well as the need to step up the theoretical and empirical studies in this field.

In this context, the meaning of the word “positive”, based on the work developed by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), denotes positive topics (like those represented by PERMA), positive target audiences, positive methods, as well as the concepts of human flourishing and the good life, which is, in the words of Seligman (2002), “using your signature strengths to obtain abundant gratification in the main realms of one’s life” (p. 262).

Meanwhile, the idea of intervention, taken from fields such as politics and medicine, bears the connotation of external agency executed through large actions to address a problem.



Ultimately, interventions have an influence on the development and enhancement of something, building the foundations for increasing the levels of well-being in different areas, such as physical health, mental health, strengths and meaning. As such, the purpose of positive interventions is the desire for things to be different than their current state.

A positive psychology intervention is an intentional, evidence-based act, whose purpose is to raise well-being in non-clinical populations (in terms of context) by enhancing that which causes or constitutes human flourishing (in terms of methodology), with a tendency to focus directly on growing good things rather than on fighting bad things (green cape *v.* red cape concept), even though the pressing need of fighting bad things is considered.

The raising of well-being, in this process, occurs by cultivating things such as pleasant affect, strengths, relationships, meaning and/or accomplishment. Positive interventions, therefore, can be rendered most effective when this “cultivating” corresponds to the formation of positive and healthy habits. Habits shape society and act as an invisible law to keep us in this same orbit throughout our lives (James, 1984), and happiness (or *eudaimonia* by Aristotle) can only be achieved through habit, since happiness is not passive: it requires constant activity for the achievement of excellence (Melchert, 2002). Hence, Balanced Meliorism (the balance between Mitigative Meliorism and Constructive Meliorism), when it comes to the formation of habits, is related to attitudes such as breaking bad habits, creating good habits and replacing broken bad habits with good habits.

One of the ways in which positive interventions can be more effective is when they are designed in a way that considers individual characteristics and variations (Schueller, 2014). Although the beneficial effects of positive psychology interventions have been demonstrated through their average effectiveness in increasing levels of well-being and decreasing depressive symptoms in studies and clinical observations (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009), we must consider that this process does not function in the same way for all people.

Sin and Lyubomirsky emphasize that the overall effectiveness of these interventions is still variable and that more solid empirical evidence is required, albeit their meta-analysis of several compiled studies concluded that positive interventions do indeed work, and work well (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009).

### **Application Plan**

In this capstone, I shall not address the details of the application plan, since they involve the entire operational and financial structure of the SBCoaching Foundation. The application plan is comprised of seven fundamental pillars that are interrelated and will help achieve the long-term vision. The seven pillars are:

1. *Science*: the scientific grounding;
2. *Methodology*: workbooks and training courses;
3. *Working team*: the change subjects and the change agents;
4. *Technology*: the technology platform and systems;
5. *Measurement*: the measurement and disclosure of results;
6. *Leadership*: positive leadership with purpose;
7. *Financial resources*: donations and revenue generation.

**1. Scientific grounding:** this capstone is the first step in the creation of a scientific knowledge base for application in the chosen domains (families, schools, companies and communities). The SBCoaching Foundation will use the research and the lessons learned through the new discoveries in the fields of positive psychology, coaching and philanthropy.

**2. Workbooks and online training courses:** the workbooks will be written in a suitable language for each of the domains, thereby facilitating the role of the change agents (educators, parents and leaders). We are annexing a workbook sample. These workbooks, just like the training courses, will be developed by the SBCoaching Foundation over the course of a 5-year roadmap.

**3. The working team:** it will be formed by the change agents – those who can help, and the change subjects – those who need help. The change agents can contribute with pro bono work, sponsorship and financial donations. The change subjects are divided into those who need help and can pay to contribute to the Foundation (companies, for example) and those who need help and cannot pay (public schools and poor communities, for example). The working team will be led by the SBCoaching Foundation, which will develop processes, procedures and technology to facilitate the team's management.

**4. The technology platform:** we will use a technology platform through which we will bring together the change agents and the change subjects, and each employee may automatically allocate the time or financial resources (for example: how many hours the coach will donate per month and when). The technology platform will also be an access portal for the change subjects, providing them with free access to online training courses or methodology workbooks. This technology platform is being developed by the SBCoaching Foundation.

**5. Measurement and disclosure of results:** all the work will be measured and case studies will be disclosed, attracting new donors to sponsor effective change or just strengthening the educational process for the use of strengths and virtues and human flourishing. The measurements will be systematized on the technology platform to facilitate the consolidation and use of the results.

**6. Positive leadership with purpose:** in order to run high-impact social projects, committed leaders will be chosen to implement the change projects. The primary leadership of the SBCoaching Foundation will be provided by the founders themselves.

**7. Financial resources:** The SBCoaching Foundation will begin its work with an initial donation of R\$1,000,000, divided over five years. This donation will be made by Villela da Matta and Flora Victoria, the founders of SBCoaching. The financial resources necessary for the upkeep of the Foundation, as well as its expansion, will be raised through two revenue

models: 1) donations and contributions; 2) sponsorship by businesspeople who want to implement flourishing programs in their own companies, and who will pay for this service by sponsoring the installment of the SEMEAR Project in poor communities.

### **Conclusion**

The SEMEAR Project is an initiative that combines coaching, positive psychology and philanthropy (C+PP+P) to promote flourishing among the Brazilian population. The aim is to increase well-being in a country that is currently immersed in a social, financial and moral crisis, as was exposed in the first part of this capstone.

The framework of the SEMEAR Project is the Clover Model, by which four main areas of well-being were established to receive the project's interventions: career; community; social; and physical and psychological. Directed at communities, families, schools and organizations, the interventions were organized under the SEMEAR acronym, which stands for Self-actualization, development and optimization; Engagement and use of strengths and virtues; Meaning, mission and purpose; Energy, positive emotions and physical vitality; Achievements, goals and objectives; and Relationships and interactions. The development of commitment, competence and character (C<sup>3</sup>) will be addressed by the SEMEAR Project's interventions, which will be described in four workbooks (for parents, teachers, organizations and communities). The workbooks – whose samples are in this capstone's appendix – will be used by the foundation's volunteer coaches, who are responsible for applying the SEMEAR Project in families, schools and organizations.

This capstone has presented a solid theoretical background, as well studies and academic research to support the proposition that the dream of a better society can be more than just a dream. And the SEMEAR Project – as the meaning of its Portuguese name suggests – can be the seed of flourishing and social change.

As an answer to the question about the origins of transformative ideas, Clammer says that they arise “in the context of response, conflict, conquest, change or the necessity [...] to reinterpret a formerly taken-for-granted social reality in new and unexpected ways” (2012, p. 249). Brazil’s current scenario could be the context for the emergence of transformative ideas described by Clammer. Its people are seeking a response to secure a better life, in a situation where the conflict between the society they want and the society they have makes the need for change even more pressing. The SEMEAR Project is an effort to offer the Brazilian people a set of tools and a system to assist them in the process of generating transformative ideas and putting them into practice. By transforming themselves into their best selves, they will be more prepared to reinterpret their social reality and change it in new and unexpected ways. Building a better country can be a first step to building a better world, a world where purpose, values, commitment and justice will be more than just words: they will be a way of life.

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