

## **TO B OR NOT TO B: IS THE B MOVEMENT REALLY CHANGING THE MEANING OF BUSINESS SUCCESS IN BRAZILIAN COMPANIES?**

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### **ABSTRACT**

New paradigms to define success often defy logic and require 'sensebreaking' rather than sensemaking in organization. For example, traditional views would consider a desire to pursue the interests of the shareholder independently the best interests of society and the world at large. This paper reflects on apparent inconsistencies between shared sensemaking, and sensegiving that has been created through the B Movement. The authors examined the meanings of public statements in communications such as mission, vision, and value statements. B Movement firms from different sectors and sizes consider to have chosen to become a force that inspires and helps society to solve social, economic and environmental problems. The B Movement is seeking to redefine or at least add to the definition of business success. This innovative meaning, jointly values corporate profits and social benefits which could come in the form of social good. Innovation that contributes to the greater good of a broader society would be considered successful under this definition as the innovation provides a profit-making activity as well as a positive contribution to the world. This research adopts a qualitative and descriptive approach to explore sensemaking, sensegiving and sensebreaking theories using secondary data such as: public documents, and institutional homepages, such as websites, Facebook, and Google Business, and other social media. The study also included an evaluation of Brazilian B Corporations narratives related to the questions, "Why became a B Corp?" and "What change does the firm seek?" The study also examines the meaning and the amplitude of the possible impact proposed by B Movement participation. Findings indicate some firm interest in environmental, social and economic actions for sustainable development but also reveal selfish interests, like obtaining a competitive market advantage, and developing network of relationships. Research about enacted meanings enable reflections on the need to review and even break some of its inconsistencies. Moreover, organizational actors need to find meaning in the movement they are involved in to assume the necessary changes that are required to live up to the spirit of the movement. In our observation, meaning comes out of the complex mix between claims of the movement and the firm's ability to match communications, and actions with those ideals. This study contributes understanding to the performance analysis of the B Movement corporations and the adherence of the movement's principles

to the company's actions and philosophical approach to business activity. It is important to review old paradigms and create new meanings that are aligned with sustainable development proposals. Sensemaking theory provides adequate subsidies to identify the gaps between the actions of the Brazilian B Corporations and the meanings attributed by the B Movement. We can propose "sense" in the traditional form to be broken (sensebreaking) and thereby opening an opportunity to influence other organizational actors (sensegiving) to move in the right direction. This legitimizes the identity of the movement that is to develop a new perspective on success for business—motivating profits and global benefits concurrently.

**Key words:** Sensemaking; Sustainability; Narratives Analysis; B Corporations.

## INTRODUCTION

The role of corporations in societies is changing from simply a profit generating organization to one that is globally intertwined into the fabric of a globalized world. Multinational Enterprises are often seen as part of the political fabric of nations and sometimes take a leadership role in meeting the social needs of society that governments have been unable or unwilling to address. Societies will often turn to companies when seeking social assistance, environmental, and economic solutions to problems that in the past were government-owned (Elkington, 2001; Savitz & Weber, 2007).

Metz et al. (2016, p. 50) also suggest that "consumer and government regulation often apply pressure to provide more environmentally friendly products and to adapt safer practices". Thus, businesses experience both a push and pull to incorporate environmental sustainability into their business practices. Even small and medium-sized enterprises are not immune to this movement (Elkington, 2001; Savitz & Weber, 2007). In response to these changes there are movements that propose corporations should rethink the current definition of *success in business* from the local through to the global levels. In view of this proposed change in thinking, the movements that propose changes in the behaviour of business practices can constitute an innovation.

The Organization for Economic and Commercial Development (OECD) has indicated, "an organisational innovation is the implementation of a new organisational method in the firm's business practices, workplace organisation or external relations" (OECD/Eurostat, 2005). Companies that join the B Movement propose to innovate in the following aspects: on the adherence of itself; when performing the assessment; when promoting operational improvements; and, using the certificate as a marketing strategy. Thus, those innovations include changes in the current state of business by consciously considering issues such as the role of the organization in society, or possible competitive advantage.

Wilburn & Wilburn (2014) have discussed benefits, requirements and issues raised around developing new models of business. They identify

companies that are incorporating the benefit corporation<sup>1</sup> structure and are becoming Certified B Corporations (Wilburn & Wilburn, 2014, p.11). Some sectors, like professional, medical, home, and personal services have strategic propensity for engaging in social initiatives because they work closely with members of society. Other industries do not have direct involvement with customers and may be less intrinsically motivated to do social good (Bronn & Vidaver-Cohen, 2009). Petrini and Pozzebon (2010) emphasized the importance of making sustainability area as an integral part of executive board, on the commitment with institutes and foundations. Although those projects are usually philanthropic in nature, some companies may engage in these activities or more selfish reasons. Examples include: brand strategy, tax reduction, etc.

The B Movement is one of several initiatives that proposes a new conduct for business. The movement envisions that “through the power of their collective voice, one day all companies will compete to be best for the world™, and society will enjoy a more shared and durable prosperity for all” (B CORP, 2017b). In other words, the initiative seeks a paradigm shift in business, fomenting the B Certification as a vehicle to reach those ends (Rodrigues, 2016), Legitimate B Corporations members strive to meet the highest standards of verified social and environmental performance, public transparency, and legal accountability, and aspire to use the power of markets to solve social and environmental problems” (B CORP, 2017b).

While corporate social responsibility actions encourage companies to reconcile economic and social objectives, the quest for social legitimacy sometimes can result in superficial measures (Bansal & DesJardine, 2014). To counteract these less than honourable intentions the B LAB developed the B Impact Assessment, to measure the governance, the workers, the community, the environment and customers areas (B CORP, 2017 and; B LAB, 2017). Currently there is a growing community of more than 2,100 Certified B Corporations from 50 countries and over 130 industries working together toward a single unifying goal: to redefine the concept of success in business to include measures of social responsibility (B CORP, 2017a).

Although the movement seeks a profound transformation, Rodrigues (2016, p.99) exposed that some corporations joined the movement to gain access to a network of the certified companies both in Brazil and in the United States”. In other cases, certification was only a mechanism to give legitimacy and strengthen the position of companies that already followed this principle from its beginnings (Rodrigues, 2016). Considering the B Certification as an organizational innovation, Damanpour and Schneider (2006) contributed, when focusing on the adoption of innovation in organizations manager’s attitudes has an important role.

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<sup>1</sup> A benefit corporation is a new type of corporation established by legislation in 30 U.S. states and D.C. This kind of structure enables the companies “to create a solid foundation for long term mission alignment and value creation” (BENEFIT CORPORATION, 2017).

On this way, “organizational leaders are instrumental in creating and maintaining the organization’s climate for change and innovation, especially when the leader has longevity in position” (Damanpour & Schneider, 2006, p.231). “In short, leadership appears to play an important role in the corporate adoption of sustainability practices” (Petrini & Pozzebon, 2010, p.364). “However, [...] simply documenting CSR-related activities without understanding their precipitating causes is unlikely to reveal real differences among firms, given the trend of rising homogeneity and near standardization in CSR reporting” (Basu & Palazzo, 2008, p.123).

Basu and Palazzo (2008) suggest that fundamental lines on corporate social responsibility are: stakeholder driven; performance driven; and, motivation driven. Additionally, Galpin, Whittington, & Bell (2015, p.1) argued that “building an organizational infrastructure that fosters a culture of sustainability results in positive employee-and organizational-level sustainability performance”. It happens, because “[...] managers, consciously and unconsciously, under take sensemaking activities every day to understand situations and construct meanings for themselves which also influence other organization a participants’ sensemaking” (Giuliani, 2016, p.220).

Sensemaking dimensions are relevant to investigate sustainability and corporate social responsibility in organizational contexts. It can provide subsidies to understand whether there are stable relationships, as well as how organization think, discuss and draw up outcomes over time. Furthermore, as narratives emerge into leadership practices results and assumptions related to sustainability claims share meanings, if Investigations into whether sensegiving is comprehended by people in organizations and whether sensebreaking from the current logic had occurred (Bennett & Orr, 2016).

Bennett & Orr (2016) examined how stories and narratives maintain explanations about practitioners and how they explain their practices. The researchers showed that chief executives use stories and narratives reflecting their experiences. Additionally, Rese, Montenegro, Bulgacov, & Bulgacov (2010) examined that narratives can guide a major discourse about strategy. Depending on the organizational context, strategy can be utilized as the writing process and discourse builders. In this way, B Corporations show a new paradigm for identifying business success. However, it is not enough to simply change this lens to see the world through this singular approach. Companies should think about the current sensegiving, at first, emphasizing results for the shareholders.

For this reason, in this essay, it is proposed the sensemaking theory can be used to comprehend sustainability in an organizational context—in this case, Brazilian B Corporations. It is [...] an alternative and potentially richer description of CSR might emerge from studying internal institutional determinants, such as the mental frames and sensemaking processes within which CSR is embedded (i.e., by studying how an organization makes sense of its world)” (Basu & Palazzo, 2008, p. 123). Moreover, “[...] sensemaking can be seen as an infrastructure of the decision-making processor as an approach that serves to

explain decision making and action: you make sense of reality and, on the basis of that reality, you start doing things [...]” (Giuliani, 2016, p. 220).

## **SUSTAINABILITY ON ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT**

Theories in the literature regarding sustainability are different. They differ because the concept of sustainable development, related to Brundtland Report—which argues that "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"—is a commitment embed by more than one interpretation of responsibilities and of the actors whom should be involved. Mapping those different ways to see sustainable development and sustainability, Hopwood, Mellor, & O'Brien (2005) classify three approaches combining concerns about environmental issues with socio-economic issues: Status Quo, Reform and Transformation.

Status Quo, recognizes that change must occur but there is not agreement that problems faced by society or environment are not separable. Society can find continuity with current structure and economic growth, associated with power structures and dominant relations, that must be addressed as a part of the solution (Hopwood, Mellor, & O'Brien, 2005). The second, Reform, differs from the firms in some aspect. At the same time, it is recognized that society faces a lot of problems and that those difficulties are related to current business and governments policies, it is not accepted that deep changes should take place. Solutions would emerge in time with increased knowledge and information on actual social and economic structures, with a focus on technology and information (Hopwood, Mellor, & O'Brien, 2005).

The thirty, Transformation, suggests that environment and social problems are directly related to relationships between human, society and nature. Moreover, as problems and crisis are thought to be rooted in current society, fundamental changes should occur, focusing primarily on the environment (Hopwood, Mellor, & O'Brien, 2005).

As shown above, each approach has limits and understand sustainability and sustainable development actions as a point of view. This article will be centred on the second lens, analysing that meanings attributed to sustainability constitutes an innovative attempt for business as well as movements that boost business from those initiatives. In this way, innovation as the result of a process of interaction between individuals, organizations, systems and institutions that seeks to find the direction in which to develop, can be considered as a determinant for the achievement of corporate sustainability (Lambooy, 2005). This occurs by promoting improvements in the efficiency and effectiveness of production and consumption systems (Van Kleef & Roome, 2007).

However, a successful implementation of sustainability on organizational contexts requires a background with an infrastructure that reflects and reinforces the initiatives. It also requires the blend of organizational culture, human resource practices and a combination of techniques that “socialize and provide the continuous development of employees who embrace the organization’s

commitment to sustainability” (Galpin, Whittington, & Bell, 2015, p.12). Thus, managers must consider not only increased sales and reduced profits and/or costs, but also the sustainable development of the business itself (Petrini & Pozzebon, 2010). Following this, environmental, social and economic dimensions are considerate, in a long-term perspective, which meets current and future needs concomitantly.

Moreover, sustainability on organizational context deals with intertemporal trade-offs in strategic decision making to enhance both organizational and societal outcomes over the long term (Bansal & DesJardine, 2014). Thus, reform requires arguments to persuade governments and international organizations to ensure changes. Based on this, institutional pressures to develop a meaningful social agenda can emanate externally from customers, transaction partners, government agencies, and others (Bronn & Vidaver-Cohen, 2009, p.95).

Each model or assumptions has some loops of feedbacks, when employees become more engaged with firm’s efforts regarding sustainability they may contribute with changes on the organization’s mission, values, goals and strategy (Galpin, Whittington, & Bell, 2015). It is also possible that personal managerial values, sense of organizational responsibility, and the belief that corporations have a moral obligation to invest in making the world a better place for future generations (Bronn & Vidaver-Cohen, 2009). Additionally, instrumental motives can have a direct impact on profitability improving revenue or protecting existing profit levels (Bronn & Vidaver-Cohen, 2009).

In summary, sustainability in an organizational context deals with a sensemaking process that requires visions to be integrated and intertemporal trade-offs to be considered, consequently these constructs require individuals to be involved in this process. Perhaps leadership plays an important role in deciding whether to adopt a sustainability-linked approach, sustainability to be placed as an ongoing process requires that the senses be understood and shared. Thus, "sensemaking would be a continuous process alternative capable for creating an intersubjective sense from shared meanings into space-temporal connections” (Munck, 2015, p. 533).

## **SENSEMAKING, SENSEBREAKING AND SENSEGIVING**

Sensemaking is a process of constructing meanings, in which people try to interpret and explain sets of questions of their environments, explaining decision making and action (Weick, 1995; Maitlis, 2005; Giuliani, 2016). Sensegiving is about the influence through sensemaking and the construction of the meaning of others toward a redefinition of organizational reality. This approach is thought to be influenced by organizational leadership and produces more than one kind of sensemaking (Gioia; Chittipeddi, 1991; Maitlis, 2005). Lastly, sensebreaking can be referred to the concepts of change when common sense is abandoned to make way for the adoption of new justifications, taking into actions with reflection capable to evaluate scenarios (Giuliani, 2016).

Organizations must make interpretations, “managers literally must wade into the ocean of events that surround the organizations and actively try to make

sense of them” (Daft & Weick, 1984 p. 286). Sensemaking is a critical activity in the organization, as key tasks of top managers, such as environmental scanning and interpretation issues, significantly influence organizational decisions and strategic changes (Maitlis, 2005). As sensemaking deals with plausibility rather than precision, it causes actions to be constantly reshaping, making them more comprehensive as they incorporate the criticisms and new data are observed (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005).

It also enables people to deal with uncertainty by elaborating rational considerations about the world and allowing action, and for this reason, both precedes and accompanies decision-making, providing answers and clear questions (Maitlis, 2005). Sensemaking occurs through an evolutionary process in which interpretations are constructed during interactions, as well as while “sensemaking relates to the identification of justifications of a specific phenomenon; sensegiving relates to the diffusion of a justification among the members of an organization, and sensebreaking is related to the adoption of a new justification” (Giuliani, 2016, p. 220).

Thus, it is assumed that:

p1) The innovations involve sensebreakings and new readings of the external and internal environment;

p2) In this context, the B Movement and sustainability should promote a collapse of sensemaking that promotes new meanings for organizations.

Sense is generated by words that are combined to convey something about ongoing experience (Weick, 1995), enacted sense to sustainability move through the stages of retention, legitimation, enactment and recognition that can be analysed by the process of construction of meaning (Munck, 2015). Interpretations deals with events that occur in the internal and external organizational environment, it can be defined as a process that deals events translations and understanding by managers (Daft & Weick, 1984).

Daft and Weick (1984) has proposed a comparative model of organizations as an interpretative system. Arguing that the complexity of system is influenced by integration of ideas and environmental interpretation. On this model, actors had described four categories of interpretation: enacting, discovering, undirected viewing and conditioned viewing. Each of them will be determined by management beliefs and organizational intrusiveness, and they explained that interpretation is a construction of meaning, understanding and learning.

In the organizational context this process is not as simple and as a consequence, three stages can be extracted that constitute the learning process and serve as the basis for an organization model of interpretation defined by Daft and Weick (1984): a) Scanning - data collection to monitor the environment and subsidize the manager's interpretation; b) Interpretation - senses are given to data from the translation of events and sharing of understandings and conceptual schemas by members of hierarchy's top.; c) Learning - characterized

by action, because it develops the knowledge about the relations between actions and results of the organization with environment.

For managers, this model asks for attention that the task of interpretation and attribute meanings to things, translating those events into meaningful tips for the other members of the organization. In addition, it allows managers to identify how interpretation occurs and the visualizations of new interpretative scenarios (Daft; Weick, 1984), because if a company really wants to be responsible with stakeholders, it requires being constantly innovating and searching for new ways of improvement in all processes where the company is involved (Kempf, 2014). Adoption an innovation depends on managers decision to go ahead with the new project and resources allocation, as well as it is need non-managers cooperation and commitment (Damanpour & Schneider, 2006).

Damanpour, & Schneider (2006, p.217) explained that “the external environment provides opportunities (information, resources, technology) and constraints (regulation, restriction on capital or information)”, therefore innovation adoptions deal with changing organizations in response to demands and opportunities. The researchers defined the following processes related to innovation into organizational context: a) Initiation: when organizational members learn of the innovation’s existence and it is communicate with others and propose its adoption; b) Adoption Decision: are related to the technical, financial and strategic perspectives. Decisions are made by organizational echelons; c) Implementation: innovation needs to be modify, and organization should be prepared to accept, trial use and proceed with the innovation until it becomes a routine.

Once researches had shown that social and environmental responsiveness are important as financial outcomes, may exist economic, regulatory and technological moderators in the establishment of a sustainability culture (Galpin, Whittington, & Bell, 2015). Environment readings undergone “scanning” and “interpretations” process. In view of this, meanings can be break and, then, driving new meanings that influence decision-making and company positioning on current logics. Being this a social process, a decision process that is dissonant of the status quo, involves shared comprehend and share new meanings about interpretations systems and its relations with internal and external environment.

Thus, the following proposition can be assumed:

p3) since sustainability depends on new processes of sensemaking, which occur at individual levels and flows into to the collective level, understanding the process of selection, retention and legitimation are vital for new meanings to be promulgated with the expected effectiveness.

Nevertheless, the adoption of a position linked to sustainability is related to an innovation on decision process, since is demanded a cognitively and linguistically process in an integrated way (Basu & Palazzo, 2008). So, Weick (1995) argued that the process of sensemaking occurs when: an individual begins to act (enactive of sensible environments), so tangible results are generated (focused on and by extracted cues) in the (social) context by helping

you to discover (retrospective) what is happening (ongoing) and which needs to be both explained (driven by plausibility rather than accuracy) and what needs to be done (grounded in identity construction).

On this way, Basu and Palazzo (2008, p.124) mentioned that sensemaking, which they related to sustainability and corporate social responsibility, involves a tripartite essential process:

**(1) cognitive**, which implies thinking about the organization's relationships with its stakeholders and views about the broader world (i.e., the "common good" that goes beyond what's good for business), as well as the rationale for engaging in specific activities that might have an impact on key relationships;

**(2) linguistic**, which involves ways of explaining the organization's reasons for engaging in specific activities and how it goes about sharing such explanations with others; and,

**(3) conative**, which involves the behavioural posture it adopts, along with the commitment and consistency it shows in conducting activities that impinge on its perceived relationships.

Therefore, Basu & Palazzo (2008) define it as a process that managers discuss relationships with stakeholders and their role commitment with a common good "with their behavioural disposition with respect to the fulfilment and achievement of these roles and relationships" (Basu & Palazzo, 2008, p. 124). Munck (2015) reports that by recording and analysing the dominant logic from the narratives, managers can realize new projects and become agents capable of creating paths that promote new meanings in line with the precepts of sustainability.

The framework of Figure 1, according to Munck (2015), explains that decisions related to sustainability can occur: a) in an instrumental / evolutionary logic, prioritizing moments 2 and 3, suffering little external influence and reinforcing the ongoing paths; b) in a relational logic, considering the external environment and several elements, reflecting on them, but without questioning the current meaning, being the beginning of the cycle demarcated from moment 1; c) in a temporal logic, identifying the meaning given to the decision process, which leads to a collective judgment on its implications and considering time and space. With this, the whole cycle is finally traversed from moment 0, in an interpretive way. [...] from the decision-making meanings portrayed in narratives, the possibility of comparing them, better understanding them, projecting effects, and performing the necessary revisions consciously, as proposed in the return to the moment 0, in the Figure emerges (Munck, 2015, p.533).

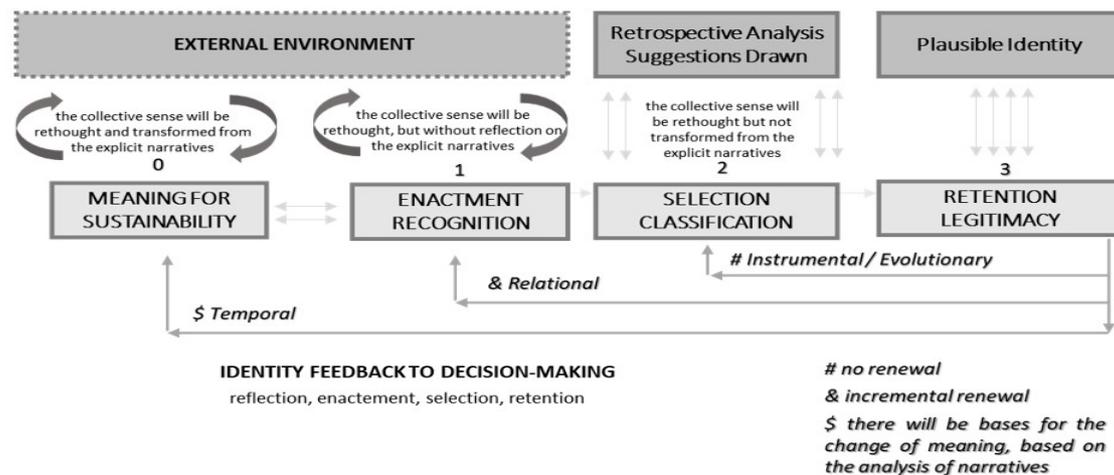


Figure 1 - Framework for analysis, understanding and reconstruction of the meaning given to decisions about sustainability management in organizations, Source: Munck (2015, p.529)

It is understood, therefore, that the meanings attributed to sustainability need to be narrated and even questioned so that they effectively represent an understanding, that is, construction of meaning, that goes to the understanding of the agents involved. However, this process is not linear; it is relational and related to spatiotemporal configuration. For this reason, a meaning for sustainability occurs when there are reflections on the ongoing narratives, passing through: selection (Where are the data? Do they represent a change need?), retention (What does data and information portray? What can be done?), legitimacy (What was found is in accordance to the internal or external environment?), as well as, enact and recognition (Are the decisions acceptable in individual and collective level? Do they make sense for agents involved in the process?).

## RESEARCH METHOD

To meet the purpose of this article, reflecting on gaps between the senses shared by the B Movement and the meanings declared by the Brazilian B Corporations in their public statements, the research used a qualitative approach to benefit from the reflective and interpretive nature of the methodology (Meneghetti, 2011). The use of qualitative case studies is a well-established approach—to understand the possible gaps between sensegiving (meaning declared by the B Movement) and sensemaking (sense declared by Brazilian B Corporations) which may or may not denote a sensebreaking with the current direction of business.

Thus, the research is descriptive and refers to a social phenomenon that can be described from the characteristics that compose it (Godoy, 2006; Gil, 2006), in the case the B Movement is a business logic related to the guiding assumptions of sustainability. Moreover, it is documentary research, since it aims to examine materials of a diverse nature that have not yet received an analytical treatment for new and/or complementary interpretations (Godoy, 1995). The documents consulted were available to the public domain by institutions in

institutional pages, as Facebook and other social media, were considered as materials the for analysis.

Furthermore, the study uses narrative analysis because narratives represent technical choices that govern an organization (Reuter, 2007). The declaration of Brazilian B Corporations was collected from institutional website and social media considering that “narratives can be produced through spoken, written, kinaesthetic, pictorial, and musical modes of representation. Spoken and written narratives are common place” (Ochs, 1997, p.185). Therefore, “narratives can arrange organizational practices as well as give meaning to the whole context” (Rese, Montenegro, Bulgacov, & Bulgacov, 2010, p. 3).

In order to support the research operationalization, we decomposed our specific objective into three others, which can be seen in the following table with their respective categories of analysis and guiding theoretical assumptions.

*Table 1 - Operational Definition of the Variables*

<b>Specific Objectives</b>	<b>Categories and Subcategories</b>	<b>Source of Information</b>	<b>References</b>
a) Identify the meanings attributed by the B Movement (sensegiving)	B Movement’s purpose Subcategories: Meanings attributed about the B Movement Declared reasons to become a B Corp	B Corporation’s Documents	- Hopwood, Mellor & O’Brien (2005); - Basu & Palazzo (2008);
b) Identify the meanings attributed by the Brazilian B Corporations (sensemaking)	Declared meanings on strategic statements (Mission, Vision and Values) Subcategories: “Why became a B Corp?” “What change seeks?” “What change have been made?”	Company profile at Brazilian B Corporation’s website; Companies strategic statements and spelled positioning in companies’ institutional pages (Facebook, Site...)	- Munck (2015); - Giuliani (2016); - Damanpour & Schneider (2006).
c) Reflect about possible distortions and its implications between meanings enacted by B Movement and meanings declared by Brazilian B Corporations (sensebreaking)	Declared meanings by the Brazilian B Corporations. Subcategories: “Why became a B Corp?” “What change seeks?” “What change have been made?”	Tese Rodrigues, J. (2016); Company’s website and public documents; Main theoretical references.	

Source: Elaborated by authors

In this way, it is assumed that facts are not isolated and rarely speak for themselves, according to Gabriel (2004) narrative and stories could be a sensemaking devices which enable people to make sense of contexts and identity events significance, finally, meanings are constructed and contested. Additionally, since narratives are the result of a project that take into account different actors, and those knowledge incites different meanings (Munck, 2015), therefore, it is argued that “studying CSR through the lens of sensemaking [...] might provide a more robust conceptual basis, rather than simply analysing the

content of its CSR actions within a certain context or over a certain period” (Basu & Palazzo, 2008, p.123).

## FINDINGS

### The B Corporation Movement and its Meanings

As exposed at B Corporation Website, “Certified B Corporations™ redefine success in business. Individually, B Corporations meet the highest standards of verified social and environmental performance, public transparency, and legal accountability, and aspire to use the power of markets to solve social and environmental problems”. B Movement declares that is the leader of a growing global movement of individuals who using business to solve social and environmental problems. Therefore, certified B Corporations aim to contribute with a redefinition of business success that is to be better for the world linking prosperity for all and collective voice to society.

As observed by Willburns & Willburn (2014) the number of B Corps certifications in the world and in the United States has grown, providing both viability for the fourth sector and opportunity for consumers to support socially responsible businesses. In addition, the authors explained that these companies have received more investments through mediators, and this has supported reaching the goal of business.

On these contexts, “[...] certification is the central element of propulsion and tangibilization of the movement. It meets the need, both of the movement and the company, to measure, in a pragmatic, judicious and comprehensive way its socio-environmental performance” (Rodrigues, 2016, p.100). As we can see on the “Declaration of Independence” promoted by the movement on its webpage, meanings are related to a new kind of economy driven by business. For this reason, companies would make the change in the world taking account as major purpose creating values not only for shareholders but for stakeholders also.

*Table 2 - “Declaration of Independence” on B Corporation*

<b>DECLARATION OF INTERDEPENDENCE</b>
We envision a global economy that uses business as a force for good. This economy is comprised of a new type of corporation - the B Corporation - Which is purpose-driven and creates benefit for all stakeholders, not just shareholders. As B Corporations and leaders of this emerging economy, we believe: That we must be the change we seek in the world. That all business ought to be conducted as if people and place mattered. That, through their products, practices, and profits, businesses should aspire to do no harm and benefit all. To do so requires that we act with the understanding that we are each dependent upon another and thus responsible for each other and future generations.

Source: B Corp. (2017f) <https://www.bcorporation.net/what-are-b-corps/the-b-corp-declaration>

As demonstrated by Rodrigues (2016), certified companies are immersed in the challenge of undertaking, as well as involving contact with the movement, direct or indirect competition and motivators. Therefore, companies need to understand what are the motivators and their meanings for the company to obtain certification. For those reasons we assume that the decisions made by

companies to start the process to get into the B Movement is related to a change and destabilization, which involves scanning the environment and recognizing a need (Giuliani, 2016; Daft & Weick, 1984; Damanpour & Schneider, 2006).

In sum, we observe processes of constructions of meaning because according to the reading that the company has about the environment, its decisions will be taken; however, it is not a simple choice. There are some challenges about the certification evaluation process. As explained by Rodrigues (2016) companies that want to receive the certification need to complete the B-Impact Assessment (BIA), so they need to be involved with the assessment process, identify the costs and benefits of the process. At this point, it is observed the need to deal with trade-offs to obtain certification (Munck, 2015; Bansal & Desjardine, 2014).

Additionally, Rodrigues (2016) explains that obtaining certification, in the case of Seal B Corp, companies are authorized to use the "seal". This involves risks and challenges and, according to the reading and attributed sense, may or may not mean a sensebreaking from the status quo. Although questioning may occur, this does not mean that there will be a transformation, as there are pre-established structures that companies need to follow, so it is assumed that the B Movement relates to a Reformist structure, where individuals, organizations, systems and institutions interact (Hopwood, Mellor, & O'Brien, 2005; Lambooy, 2005).

### **B Movement in Brazil: The Brazilian B Corporations Meanings**

The B Movement was officially launched in Brazil as "Sistema B" (nomenclature used in Latin America) in 2013. Rodrigues (2016) explains that in the South American region the "Sistema B" acts to seek for public policies, due the difference of legislation in Brazil, for example, and in the North American countries, where there is a legal nucleus to support the certification of the companies. This was done because the organizations need to establish the social object and function that, technically, would already meet on the guidelines proposed by the movement regarding the generation of economic and social values.

When analysing a company's profile, we could find that the industry sectors with more certified companies are those which offer services or products directly related to sustainability practices, such as "Sustainability Consulting", "Marketing & Communications Services" (branding) and "Management and Financial Consulting". However, we cannot assume that those companies were created to benefit the world, considering that they are service providers to others that want to be sustainable, they, at first, aim to attempt a market objective. It also differs from the kinds of companies identified by from Bronn & Vidaver-Cohen (2009) that had customer directed involves - professional, medical, home and personal service.

This shows that companies have found a niche market, even if their essence has a different purpose, demonstrating adaptation and meaning constructions, but the logic still is: business were created for meeting the status

quo structures, at the same time it is not faced that those problems could be related with (Hopwood, Mellor &, O'Brien, 2005). At the same time, it converges to the idea of sustainability-driven innovation creating new products or services (Metz et al, 2016), because as explained by Bansal & Desjardine (2014), sustainability on organizational contexts deals with organizational and social outcomes on the long-term.

When analysing the question, "Why became a B Corp?" only one company attributed the certification as a way to grow more sustainable. The others declared to have sought the B Certification by identifying values, or already considered itself as a sustainable company, or like a benefit corporation. Among these are: a. company that performs some social practice (not that its products or services necessarily contribute to society, but by somehow improving people's lives); b. a company that recognizes the strength and influence that the companies have in society; c. company is not only for-profit.

*Table 3: Brazilian B Corporations' public declarations about the B Certification into its webpages*

<b>Does the company declared to be a B Corp?</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	43	59,7
No	29	40,3
Total	72	100

Source: Elaborated by authors

*Table 4: Identified meanings associated related to the question "Why became B?"*

<b>Purposes</b>	<b>Companies that mentioned</b>
Assess	3
Benefit Corporation	35
Certificate	11
Community	24
Networking	14
Recognition	15
Publicity	5
Null	20

Source: Elaborated by authors

Even the companies which declared to seek being a B Corp to be part of a community of values, to get a certificate, for networking or recognition, only 43 (60%) disclose the certificate on its web pages and 5 companies sought the certificate purely for public recognition regarding their practices. Some firms recognize the certificate as an award, including, one company that indicates the certificate as a corporate social project, and another one refers to B Corporation as a business partner. Examples of those narratives can be seen on the following table:

*Table 4: Narratives on Brazilian B Corporations' Websites about the B Certification:*

"We are the first Brazilian fashion company to receive the certificate of B company, the B Corp certification. A seal that recognizes and validates new organizational models that encourage to use the power of business to solve social and environmental problems, always in line with the concept of solidarity economy."
"Sistema B is a global movement that certifies companies that use their market power to solve social and environmental issues."
"Being part of this movement shows us that we are on the right track."
"We are part of a global network of organizations that combine economic growth with the promotion of social and environmental well-being."
"We work with a new concept of doing business, better for workers, communities and the environment."
"We are a company certified by system B - global network of companies and organizations with positive social and environmental impact. We believe we can join economic growth with responsibility and sustainability. We promote events and share content in line with ideas from the new education, culture maker, and open source."
"The 'X' is a Company B, a system that certifies the organizations which are part of a global movement seeking the economic development considering the socio-environmental aspects."
"We, at 'Y', do not want to be the best company in the city or the country, but we want to be the best company for the city and for society."

Source: Elaborated by authors

To identify the changes declared by Brazilian B Corporations, there were determined Impact Categories sought by the Brazilian B Corporations through its public statements<sup>2</sup> exposed on its websites and on the B Corporation's website related to the question "What change do you seek?". It is intended that those declarations by the companies represented a linguistic process, explaining why they aim to be part of the movement (Basu & Palazzo, 2008).

It was used Portocarrero & Delgado's study (2010, apud Rodrigues, 2016) - which analysed 33 cases of social business in iberoamerican region and identified 4 social impact categories. According to the authors, the impacts can be tangible: increase income and access to products and services to supply unmet needs; or intangibles: construction of citizenship and social capital development to improve the lives of poor people.

Briefly, the categories were framed as following: a. access to products and services: supplying cheaper products or services, or solutions to fill the gaps of the public services; b. increase income: enlargement of life opportunities, like promoting steady jobs or self-employment, integrating people in productive chains and entrepreneurship incentives; c. construction of citizenship: enabling access to information, power and influence to exercise the rights and obligations of low income people or low schooling; d. social capital development: activities to inclusion of people in economic initiatives (Portocarrero & Delgado, 2010 apud Rodrigues, 2016).

Three important observations need to be stressed about the activities categorization: a. the activities aimed to enable access to knowledge, like

<sup>2</sup> The social impact categories and the dimensions of sustainability were identified according to the strategic benchmark presented on the Brazilian B Corps' webpages (institutional or Facebook) or by answers found on B Corporations website, without judgment or confirmation of veracity.

education institutions and schools of foreign language, was framed as activities for citizenship development - even without explicit statement about assisting low income people; b. although some companies has attending more than one social impact category, the most expressive social impact category of its performance was considered; c. the innovative products and services related to some aspect of the triple-bottom-line was considered as 'access to products and services' because the attending a market gap, and not necessarily a public service gap.

*Table 6: Impact Categories Identified on Brazilian B Corporations' Websites and B Corporation's Website related to the answer "What change do you seek?"*

<b>Impact Categories</b>	<b>Compani es</b>	<b>%</b>
Access to products and services	44	61,1
Increase income	11	15,3
Construction of citizenship	9	12,5
Social capital development	8	11,1
TOTAL	72	100

Source: Elaborated by authors and categories defined from Rodrigues (2016)

Rodrigues (2016) identified that among the stakeholders of the movement there are those who have direct influence with the government (for dealing with public policies) and the prospects (companies with potential for certification). Besides there are indirect influencers which are pointed out by the author as: the academy and the company, which are connected to produce knowledge and forming opinion; and, the customers and the market, which press for sustainability. However, whether one of the B Movement's purpose is also to add value for shareholders, the sustainable economic development was the less referenced, 23 companies have mentioned, and most of the time it was subtly presented - just two companies declares directly to seek the economic growth.

*Table 7: Sustainability Dimensions Founded on the Brazilian B Corporationss' Statements*

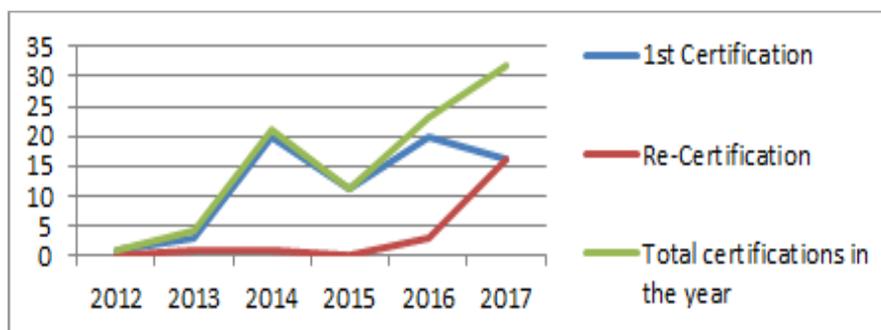
<b>Sustainabilit y Dimensions</b>	<b>Number of Recurrence</b>
Environmental	35
Economic	23
Social	54
Unknown	4

Source: Elaborated by authors

The first Brazilian company to get B Corp certification occurred in 2012. Afterward, seventy-two Brazilian companies achieved this certification (as shown on B Corporation website), presenting an irregular, positive growth year by year, as shown at "Table 8: Number of Brazilian companies that have adhered to B Corp certification". Among these companies, 21 (57%) have already performed some recertification as B Corp, 16 (26%) are displaying expired certification, and one of them are no longer in the B LAB reports and in the B Corporation website. It demonstrates in an initial moment the sense can be broken, and then, the process of selection and retention can be identified. However, restricted to an

instrumental and evolutionary sense observing the pillars of sustainability, but prevailing an economic motivation (MUNCK, 2015).

*Table 8: Number of Brazilian companies that have adhered to B Corp certification*



Source: Elaborated by authors

When analysing company's strategic statements and stated positioning, we also observed that companies typically do not declared their standing in all dimensions (mission, vision and values). Eighteen companies that declared their missions, present it superficially. For this reason, whether a successful implementation of sustainability requires a background with an infrastructure that reflects and reinforces the initiative, combining all the organizational culture aligned to strategic and goals (Galpin, Whittington, & Bell, 2015), the lack of relationship between meanings attributed to B Movement and the turn into mission, vision and values, represents a lack of consistence with the conative process identified by Basu & Palazzo (2008).

### **Possible distortions and its implications**

In this way, considering that meanings are constructed into social contexts when individuals extracted meanings by cues to generate tangible results (Weick, 1995), we can see that Brazilian B Corporations demonstrated a cognitive process related to sustainability on organizational context because they think about organizational relationships in society (Basu & Palazzo, 2008). On the other hand, this process of constructing meanings is not completed because a sensebreaking did not necessarily occur for most agents involved, then new justifications should be shared and diffused considering a more incisive posture (Giuliani, 2016; Weick, 1995; Basu & Palazzo, 2008).

Rodrigues (2016) stands out as an example that the Brazilian B Corporations' entrepreneurs consider they were a B Corp before the B Certification, citing the same principles are in its foundations. Then, the author asserts the certification is a legitimization tool to increase an ideological positioning. Considering that adoption an innovation depends on managers decision to go ahead with the new project and resources allocation, it needs non-managers cooperation and commitment (Damanpour & Schneider, 2006). Employee engagement is need because sustainability in the organizational context is a complex process and involves both, individual and collective

meanings, as well as intertemporal trade-offs (Munck, 2015; Bansal & Desjardine, 2014).

When becoming engaged with a firm's efforts towards sustainability employees can be agents that can positively facilitate the process (Galpin, Whittington, & Bell, 2015), having shared values and the notion that companies have a moral obligation to make the world a better place for future generations (Bronn & Vidaver-Cohen, 2009), and whether they are prepared to take effective actions. The enactment of new meanings and effectiveness related to sustainability requires government alignment also (Hopwood, Mellor, & O'Brien, 2005), because it is necessary institutional pressures to develop a meaningful social agenda (Bronn & Vidaver-Cohen, 2009).

But, on these contexts, assuming that sustainability is driven by shared values by agents, economic incentives, such as tax deductions to persuade companies to be aligned to B Movement can have limited results (Wilburn & Wilburn, 2014). It is limited because the actions can reinforce utilitarian logics and assumptions that do not consider economic, social and environmental sustainability dimensions, and its intertemporal trade-offs (Munck, 2015; Bansal & Desjardine, 2014), resulting into reactive actions.

To analyse the sustainability in the B Movement, the framework proposed by Munck (2015) at Figure 1, - which illustrates decisions-making process related to sustainability in organizational context - was used as a reference. From this analysis we can conclude the decision-making process passes through the following moments: sensebreaking, sensegiving and sensemaking. This moment portrays periods of change and understanding of meanings, which are not necessarily successive, but it's important to stress they are fully interdependent.

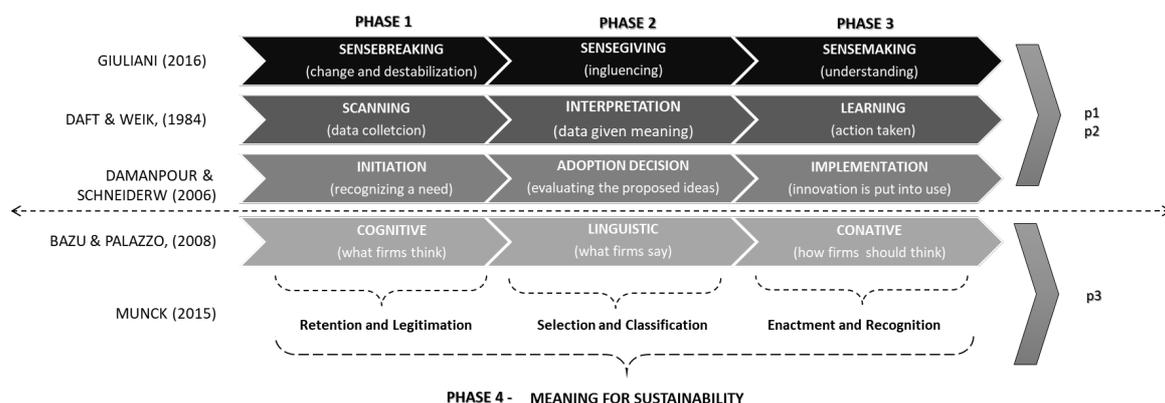


Figure 2 - Main theoretical references and its relationship with sustainability on organizational context, Source: Elaborated by authors

In the first stage, Phase 1, we can assume that: when recognizing the necessity of change (initiation) by interpreting the organizational context (scanning), a cognitive process happens wherein the meanings are interrupted, and then a process related to meanings construction starts in the organizational context for sustainability. It occurs by the destabilization and changes of meanings (sensebreaking). The necessity of changes is recognized depending on

the organizational context, which meet its management's assumptions (cognitive). Seen in these terms, the retention and legitimation of the identified paths are linked to an innovation.

In sequence, the Phase 2 tends to occur when the necessity of changes is interpreted, and the given meanings are found (interpretation). Then, proposals ideas are evaluated to making the decisions (adoption decision). Even being this decision-making process usually associated with top management, the adopted ways are materialized in organizational narratives (linguistic) which will be widespread and share with different public bodies. There is an influence process (sensegiving) that occurs through what have been selected and classified.

For this reason, on Phase 3, to put innovation in use (implementations) and to have actions taken (learning) it is necessary to make sense by the agents involved in this process. Passing through "top-down" to "bottom up" also, announcing how firm should think and act (conative). By the comprehension of those movements, the meanings become to be enacted and recognized for both organizational leadership and staffs, and by the organization's environment where they operate. Consequently, this outsource of new meanings shall pressure to shift current meanings.

The Phase 4 is regarding the meanings attributed to sustainability in the organizational context, which are related to a complex process of meanings constructions incorporated and integrated into different point of views, senses and considering intertemporal trade-offs.

The constructing of meanings for sustainability belongs to a process which assumes changes in organizational actions and decisions, embed by all hierarchical levels and enactment and recognitions of those new meanings by organizations in long-term. Thus, if a general aspect of an innovation is its implementation (OECD, 2005), the sustainability is only legitimized when the meanings attributed results in actions and decisions taken.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

This study contributes to the analysis of the performance of the B Movement and the adherence of its principles to the companies, because the understanding of meanings attributed by the agents involved in the B Movement, B LAB and B Corporations, is important to review and create new meanings aligned with sustainable development proposals. Considering those initiatives are perceived as innovations into the way business are conducted, it represents process of sensemaking, sensegiving and sensebreaking interrelated and interconnected.

Regarding the prepositions assumed into theoretical frame, "P1" and "P2" when evaluating the Brazilian B Corporations narratives related to the questions "Why became a B Corp?" and "What change do you seek?", it was identified that a restricted knowledge exists among the organizations regarding on the meaning and the amplitude of the possible impact proposed by B Movement. There are some environmental, social and economic actions for

sustainable development but, in this way, prevails specifics and selfish interests, like obtaining a competitive market advantage and constitute network of relationships.

Furthermore, considering that “[...] while sensemaking relates to the idea of understanding and sensegiving to that of influencing, sensebreaking can be referred to the concept of change and destabilization” (Giuliani, 2016, p.221), infers the B Movement is responsible by the sensegiving (regards the diffusion of a justification among the members of an organization) of movement in global context. On the other hand, it does not mean the certified companies are sharing the senses of the movement, sensemaking (regards the identification of justifications of a specific phenomenon), as directed to them. This study contributes to performance evaluation of the B Movement and the adherence of its principles by Brazilian B Corporations.

Then, regarding to proposition “P3”, sensemaking theory provides adequate subsidies to identify the gaps between the meanings intended by the Brazilian B Corporations and the meanings attributed by B Movement. We can propose senses to be broken (sensebreaking) and thus can influence other organizational actors (sensegiving) on the right way. This would be legitimizing the identity of the movement that is to be a new perspective for business, on this case, being also a “Benefit for the World™”.

For this reason, sensemaking theory provides adequate subsidies to identify the gaps between the meanings intended by the B Corporations and the meanings assigned by B Movement. It allows the problematization of involved actors to the identification of such meanings and to thus to construct and to legitimize an identity aligned with the movement (Weick, 1995). When reflecting about senses, they can be revised and even broken, regarding a material shift to the current paradigm that defines business success.

Finally, it seems that we should be conformed to the instrumental/evolutionary sense presented and explained on Figure 1, when thinking about the capacity of B Movement change meaning of business success in Brazilian companies. We perceive a transition process, which claims for new meanings. But, the proposed meanings, reflected on organizations actions, seem to be still related to status quo, considering social business as a niche of market.

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