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## **Developing a Culture of Solidarity Through a Three-Step Virtuous Process: Lessons from Common-Good-Oriented Organizations**

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### **Abstract**

Solidarity is a principle oriented toward the common good that ensures that each person can have the necessary goods and services for a dignified life. As such, it is very often approached in a theoretical manner. In this empirical study, we explored the development of a culture of solidarity within an organizational context. In particular, we qualitatively investigated how a culture of solidarity can concretely spread within and beyond organizations by conducting 68 semi-structured interviews with members of three common good-oriented organizations located in the Philippines, Korea, and Paraguay. We found that a culture of solidarity develops through a three-step process that includes constructing the solidarity mission, sharing solidarity, and disseminating solidarity, which together form a virtuous circle. We further found that solidarity is not supported by constrained, instrumentalized, or sacrificial actions, but can instead be a free, authentic, and fulfilling way for members of an organization to flourish while serving the mission of their company.

**Keywords:** common good; culture of solidarity; Economy of Communion (EoC); logic of gift; solidarity

## **Introduction**

Academic studies have most often sought to define solidarity by focusing on its manifestations, which results in evidence showing that certain organizations are concerned with doing more good and less harm (Voegtlin et al., 2012). Current investigations into solidarity are proliferating, especially within some emerging economic movements, such as conscious capitalism (Mackey and Sisodia, 2014), the sharing economy (Schor and Wengronowitz, 2017), the Economy of Communion (Bruni and Grevin, 2016; Frémeaux and Michelson, 2017; Gallagher and Buckeye, 2014), and the solidarity economy (Ahmed, 2015; Hart et al., 2010), all of which seek to distance themselves from an excessive focus on the pursuit of profit.

As noted by several researchers, it has always been difficult to provide a clear definition of solidarity, given the genesis of the principle (Gutián, 2020) and since most of its explanations are unfortunately “tautological” (Ahmed, 2015, p. 427). Gutián (2020) denounces the imprecision traditionally coupled with the concept of solidarity by providing an updated interdisciplinary account of the history of the principle of solidarity. In the genesis of the principle, there have been diverse and at the same time related currents influencing each other, all of which are developed on the basis of specific philosophical, political, and sociological presuppositions; some come from a context of faith and theological reflection, while others are alien to a theological orientation, or even contrary to it. Based on an analysis of Catholic Social Teaching (CST), Gutián (2020) proposes a more accurate definition of solidarity, whereby each person—and each community—by reason of their common origin, dignity, and destiny must contribute with their brothers and sisters to the common good of society at all levels. Similarly, in a recent study on offshore outsourcing, Gutián and Sison

(2022) retain this definition by establishing solidarity as a principle oriented toward the common good.

While we fully agree that the solidarity principle is aimed at the common good of society, we also maintain that such an understanding is based on the assumption that all people have responsibility for each other and must ensure that each person can access the necessary goods and services for a dignified life (Arjoon et al., 2018; Donati, 2008). From this perspective, solidarity can be interpreted as both an end pursued by all participants in the solidarity project, whatever their political, religious, and spiritual beliefs (Gutián, 2015; Martins, 2021; Melé and Dierksmeier, 2012; Sison et al., 2016), and as a means to pursue the common good as a higher end. Indeed, solidarity is a human need linked to the deeply social nature of humans (Arjoon et al., 2018; Cremers, 2017), characterized by having “the need for dialogue, compassion, and empathetic understanding” (Arjoon et al., 2018, p. 155), which leads us to see others as peers and to regard others’ needs as our own or as a reason for our actions (MacIntyre, 1999). However, solidarity is not reducible to concern for the other; rather, it is based on an awareness of the *interdependence between individuals*.

It is hardly surprising that an academic body of work has begun to develop around solidarity in the field of organizational studies (Fleischmann et al., 2022) to explore the political and socioeconomic implications of new solidarity practices, but also in the *Journal of Business Ethics* (Gutián and Sison, 2022; Kelly, 2004; Melé, 2012; O’Brien, 2009; Sison and Fontrodona, 2013). These studies on solidarity fail to agree on a definition of the concept, adopting either a manifestation-centered view or a consideration of the higher purposes intended (Arjoon et al. 2018; Gutián and Sison, 2022). They also struggle to differentiate this concept from other notions derived from the common-good perspective (Gutián, 2020). The

small number of empirical studies contributes to this conceptual imprecision (Arjoon et al., 2018; Frémeaux, 2020; Sison, 2007); when the focus of the principle of solidarity lies only on its normative dimension, there is an increased risk of confusing justice and solidarity, and of reducing solidarity to respect for human dignity and fundamental ethical standards, rights, and duties. However, as Guitián and Sison (2022, p. 5) remind us, “ethics cannot be limited to rules” and should also accommodate the consideration of lived experience.

Given this picture, to address the aforementioned conceptual imprecisions and to shed light on the development and experience of solidarity, the question arises as to how solidarity can become a tangible reality in organizations. Since solidarity, due to its very specific social nature, cannot be reduced to an individual intention or practice, we turn our attention to the culture of solidarity to investigate how it can develop in the business context. As emphasized by Naughton and Cornwall (2010), the concept of “culture, as the root of the word indicates, cultivates within us a way of seeing the world, to see what is real, to make sense of reality. It creates, in us, when it is operating well, a deep sensitivity to what is important and worthy of sacrifice. It forms within us what is moral and spiritual, of what is most worthy in our lives, by helping us to understand the deep human reality of our origins and our destiny” (p. 11). Moving into the organizational context, the concept of culture refers to a common social way of working that involves a shared feeling of connection and commitment among people and common ethical behaviors (Melé, 2003; Naughton and Cornwall, 2010; Zamagni and Bruni, 2013).

With this in mind, the concept of culture will help to understand more clearly the way in which the different members of organizations can build, share, and encourage solidarity. More specifically, we attempt to answer the following question: *How can the culture of solidarity*

*be developed and spread within and beyond organizations?* To address this issue, we focus on values-based, other-oriented organizations (Bruni and Smerilli, 2009, 2014), which are also called “common-good-oriented organizations”, (Frémeaux and Michelson, 2017) the ideal mission of which is not the maximization of profit or wealth. For our study, we selected three common-good-oriented companies, one each in the Philippines, Korea, and Paraguay, whose emphasis is solidarity with the most deprived people in society. To explore how these companies implement and develop a culture of solidarity, we chose to conduct a qualitative investigation based on 68 semi-structured interviews with members of our selected companies.

Through our study, we contribute to the literature on solidarity from a common good perspective by showing that there are different levers, stages, and signs of development of a culture of solidarity. We also provide some clear guidance to business leaders and, more generally, to all those who have the power to act within organizations on how to contribute to this phenomenon. We demonstrate that solidarity is not supported by *constrained*, *instrumentalized*, or *sacrificial* actions but is a particularly effective way, perhaps the most effective way, for members of an organization to flourish while serving the mission of their company.

Our article is structured as follows. We first review the literature on solidarity from a common good perspective and emphasize the concept of solidarity as both a principle and an experience. In the second section, we describe the methodology of our empirical study by explaining how we collected and analyzed our data. In the third section, we present our main findings, highlighting the different steps in the development of a culture of solidarity. We conclude by discussing the theoretical contributions of our study and presenting some

possible avenues for future research.

## Literature Review

Solidarity is abundantly mentioned in Catholic Social Teaching (Gutián, 2015; Martins, 2021; Melé and Dierksmeier, 2012; Sison et al., 2016), particularly in the encyclical *Caritas in veritate* (CV), which offers a coherent and unifying view of various intertwined concepts (human dignity, common good, reciprocity, gratuitousness and solidarity)<sup>1</sup>, and more recently in the *Fratelli tutti* (FT) encyclical letter<sup>2</sup>. In business ethics literature, “solidarity” is defined as an approach to achieving the common good by encouraging individuals to pursue a personal good through participation in a collaborative work (Sison and Fontrodona, 2012, 2013), in a community good (Frémeaux, 2020), or in cooperation (Finnis, 1986; Messner, 1965). Solidarity fosters this pursuit of the common good since it facilitates awareness of the interdependence among people and elicits a commitment to entering dialogue (Arjoon et al., 2018; Kelly, 2004).

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<sup>1</sup> Solidarity reflects “a sense of responsibility on the part of everyone with regard to everyone” (CV 38): “The reality of human solidarity, which is a benefit for us, also imposes a duty [...] An overemphasis on rights leads to a disregard for duties [...] Duties thereby reinforce rights and call for their defense and promotion as a task to be undertaken in the service of the common good” (CV 43). CST stresses the responsibility of companies in terms of solidarity as a way to civilize the economy: “authentically human social relationships of friendship, solidarity and reciprocity can also be conducted within economic activity, and not only outside it or after it” (CV 36). Furthermore, CST praises the merits of a “chain of solidarity” (John Paul II, 1991, 43); indeed, “economic activity cannot prescind from gratuitousness, which fosters and disseminates solidarity and responsibility for justice and the common good among the different economic players” (CV 38).

<sup>2</sup> CST sees solidarity as an important allied to help the neediest and most vulnerable people: “Solidarity finds concrete expression in service, which can take a variety of forms in an effort to care for others. And service in great part means ‘caring for vulnerability, for the vulnerable members of our families, our society, our people’. In offering such service, individuals learn to ‘set aside their own wishes and desires, their pursuit of power, before the concrete gaze of those who are most vulnerable... Service always looks to their faces, touches their flesh, senses their closeness and even, in some cases, suffers that closeness and tries to help them’.” (FT 115). The care toward the poorest can be put in practice by building a model of social, political and economic participation “that can include popular movements and invigorate local, national and international governing structures with that torrent of moral energy that springs from including the excluded in the building of a common destiny”, while also ensuring that “these experiences of solidarity which grow up from below, from the subsoil of the planet—can come together, be more coordinated, keep on meeting one another” (FT 169).

Unsurprisingly, there are some parallels between common-good thinking and reflection on solidarity. Similar to the common good (De Torre, 1977), solidarity refers to dimensions that are both transcendental and immanent: that is, transcendent solidarity, which reflects the moral order, is based on the social conditions implemented by immanent solidarity. In other words, just as the common good is both a moral goal and a set of social conditions (see Argandoña, 1998; Costa and Ramus, 2012; Martin, 2011; Melé, 2009, 2012; O'Brien, 2009; Sison and Fontrodona, 2011, 2012, 2013; Sison et al., 2016), solidarity presents both moral and social facets (Kelly, 2004). More specifically, at the moral level, solidarity requires reciprocal dialogue, which presupposes, among others, mutual listening and speaking, whereas at the social level, solidarity implies a sense of partnership and human sociality. Therefore, in this common-good thinking, solidarity can be understood as both a philosophical and moral principle and as both an individual and collective experience (Ahmed, 2015; Kelly, 2004; Sison, 2017).

### ***Solidarity as a Philosophical and Moral Principle***

Solidarity and the common good have similar philosophical roots that date back to Aristotelian-Thomistic thought, according to which the pursuit of virtues is inconceivable without the relationship to others and the group life (Audi, 2012; Bertland, 2009; Hartman, 2008; Solomon, 2004). Solidarity appears in Catholic Social Teaching as a virtue defined in the well-known passage of *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (SRS) (38) as “a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all”. More precisely, solidarity is an aspect of the virtue of justice, which, for Thomas Aquinas, “is nothing else than to render to each one his own” (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, Q. 58, art. 11). Hence, the concepts of solidarity and social justice are close, referring to a way of promoting the common good, the



responsibility of all groups within society, and a virtue that we should all practice (Booth and Petersen, 2020; Yerkes and Bal, 2022). Beyond the normative dimension, the notion of solidarity also emphasizes certain relational aspects, especially with regards to cooperation and commonality; solidarity is based both on an awareness of the benefits of interdependent relationships directed toward the common good and on a determination to act in accordance with each other's needs<sup>3</sup>. MacIntyre (1999) asserted that human beings, to be fulfilled, must strive to have good relations with others. He therefore promoted consideration of the needs of others, determination to give freely, and concern for the weakest, whose vulnerability holds society together.

As previously highlighted by the Thomistic philosopher Jacques Maritain (1948), the development of good relations between people is favored by the exercise of rights but also by respect for duties. As a result, within a given community, our right to be supported because of our vulnerabilities is associated with our duty to pay attention to the vulnerabilities of other members (Spaemann, 2006). The “duty of solidarity” means the protection of the most vulnerable and respect for the principle of non-exclusion, but also the implementation of the principle of responsibility (Bilgrien, 1999). In other words, not only should no individual within a given group be sacrificed, forgotten, or excluded, but all members of a community should also be responsible for each other and should ensure that everyone has access to the goods and services that he or she needs to perform dignified work (Pirson, 2019; Pirson et al., 2016).

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<sup>3</sup> As highlighted by CST, “It is above all a question of interdependence, sensed as a system determining relationships in the contemporary world, in its economic, cultural, political and religious elements, and accepted as a moral category. When interdependence becomes recognized in this way, the correlative response as a moral and social attitude, as a ‘virtue’, is solidarity” (SRS 38).

All things considered, it is hardly surprising that solidarity is enacted as an “ontological principle” that guides ethical behavior (Gundlach in Guitián, 2020, pp. 32–33). Like the common good principle (Melé, 2009), the solidarity principle supposes that the flourishing of the community can enhance the integral development and well-being of the individuals in that community (Guitián and Sison, 2022), thereby differing from the liberal principle of the individual pursuit of self-interest, naturally leading to the greatest aggregate good for all in society. This philosophical and moral principle gives rise to a multiplicity of social principles (Barrera, 2001), including socialization (which invites the members of an organization to provide assistance to those who are no longer able to strive for their own good or for that of the community) and a preferential option for the poor (which leads the members of an organization to take particular care of the poorest). Thus, an organizational system that is putting in practice the principle of solidarity is coherent with an ethical system that looks “beyond minimum conditions and consider the integral flourishing of the worker” (Guitián and Sison, 2022, p. 10) and that ensures that “our right to have our dignity respected by others is irrevocably linked to our duty to respect the dignity of others” (Cremers, 2017, p. 717).

### ***Solidarity as an Individual and Collective Experience***

Solidarity is also both an individual and collective experience that prevents the exclusion or isolation of a worker whose contribution to the common good could be valuable. According to Sison and Fontrodona (2012), the particular contribution of workers to the common good process cannot be replaced by the efforts of others, whereas financial capital or equipment can easily be replaced by any other similar resource. Sison (2007) showed how in Tasubinsa, a special employment and occupational center where 90% of the workers have at least 30% mental, sensorial, or physical impairments, the disabled persons contribute to the common good by fostering excellence of mind and character and developing virtues among all the

workers. Since the common production process would not be the same without every one of the workers, the formation of a community capable of pursuing the common good should be based on solidarity (Sison and Fontrodona, 2012, 2013; Sison et al., 2016).

The mechanism behind solidarity seems to be similar to that of the culture of giving or “common union” (communion) (Cremers, 2017, p. 722). A growing number of studies have pointed out that interpersonal relationships within organizations are established through the logic of gratuitousness (Baviera et al., 2016; Faldetta, 2011; Melé and Naughton, 2011) or the logic of gift (Baviera et al., 2016; Faldetta, 2018), which is interestingly defined as giving due to solidarity (Kearns, 2017) rather than through contractual logic. It may even be that the logic of gratuitous gift is the most efficient driving force behind the relational dynamic (Feiler et al., 2012; Melé and Naughton, 2011), generalized cooperation (Emmons and McCullough, 2004; Fehr et al., 2017), or generalized reciprocity (Alter, 2009; Bruni, 2008; Caillé and Grévy, 2014). Just as the logic of gratuitous gift can “serve as the agent of integration” (Melé and Naughton, 2011, p. 6), can spread within an organization, and can benefit other actors belonging to broader communities, the culture of solidarity–intended “as a token of the logic of gift and gratuitousness” (Gutián and Sison, 2022, p. 10)–may also benefit all members of the work community and other actors of society.

With this in mind, we argue that the use of the terminology “culture of solidarity” is particularly appropriate for examining the origin and diffusion of solidarity within organizations. The concept of culture has already been used for similar purposes, for example, in reference to organizational humanizing cultures that are oriented toward the common good, as opposed to cultures “in which individuals are looking exclusively for their own self-interest at any cost and, therefore, are subordinating the common goals and other aspects of the

common good to their self-interests” (Melé, 2003, p. 7). Our study focuses on the culture of solidarity to better understand its specificity in comparison to other dehumanizing, or at least individualistic cultures, as well as the process by which it can be established. Thus, we explore how it can be developed, shared, and spread within and beyond organizations.

## **Methods**

Some other-oriented and value-based organizations (Bruni and Smerilli, 2009, 2014) or organizations that are oriented toward the common good (Frémeaux and Michelson, 2017) have expressed their explicit attachment to the social and solidarity vocation. These organizations are characterized by three basic criteria: (i) their activities are engendered by a vocation that represents their values, identity, and mission; (ii) most of their members share and embody that vocation; and (iii) these intrinsically motivated members are less reactive to price signals (i.e., wages; Bruni and Smerilli, 2009). This is the case of the enterprises of the Economy of Communion (EoC), in which we conducted our qualitative investigation.

### ***Choice of the Communion and Solidarity-Based Economy***

The EoC movement was started in May 1991, thanks to the initiative of the Italian spiritual figure Chiara Lubich, founder of the Focolare Movement. She initiated this network of entrepreneurs in the hope of promoting the development of a more solidarity-based economy (Lubich, 2001, 2007). The EoC movement constitutes a relevant field for the analysis of the culture of solidarity for two reasons. First, the thousand companies gathered within this economy have a common desire to pursue the objective of solidarity by spreading the “culture of giving”, according to which “people begin to truly work when the recipient of their free work is the other. In this way, work can thus be understood as a gift, and, consequently, the remuneration of work should also be understood as a gift in a logic of reciprocity” (Sferrazzo,

2020, p. 238). Second, the organization acts “as a community of individuals aiming toward communion” (Minnerath and de Dijon, 2008, p. 49). In particular, within the EoC companies, the principle of communion is not acquired once for all, but must be continually sought through the adoption of specific communion practices and tools (Argiolas, 2014).

With clear and explicit reference to Catholic spirituality and the notion of communion (Bruni and Smerilli, 2009; Bruni and Uelmen, 2006), the EoC movement involves entrepreneurs, associations, economic institutions, workers, managers, consumers, investors, scholars, economic operators, and citizens with the aim of participating in the common good. More precisely, it strives to provide goods and services that truly serve to implement a policy of helping people in real need to reduce poverty, and to encourage proximity-related community projects through an economy model based on sharing, justice, and subsidiarity (Baggio, 2013; Gold, 2003). The characteristic features of this economy have been examined in a few disparate works (Argiolas, 2009; Baldarelli, 2011; Bruni, 2002; Bruni and Grevin, 2016; Bruni and Uelmen, 2006; Bruni and Zamagni, 2004; Frémeaux and Michelson, 2017; Gallagher and Buckeye, 2014; Grevin, 2019, 2022) and are also reported in a collection of documents (testimonies, theses, research papers, and conferences) on the EoC website at <https://www.edc-online.org/en>.

Given this picture, the EoC field allows us to observe a very wide variety of solidarity practices, ranging from the internal redistribution of profits to the direct help and assistance extended by the company members to the poorest (Bruni and Grevin, 2016; Gallagher and Buckeye, 2014). On the other hand, all these practices seek to instill a dynamic culture of relational solidarity, the analysis of which is precisely the object of our study.

### ***Data Collection***

One of us co-authors made a succession of trips between 2011 and 2020 to three continents (South America, Europe, and Asia) to observe work experiences in a multiplicity of EoC companies. To understand how the culture of solidarity originates and grows in the business world, we chose from among the EoC companies visited, three companies located in two continents—Asia and South America. These three companies are a major development bank in the Philippines that specializes in microfinance and very small businesses, with 370 employees; a South Korean bakery with 400 employees in 10 shops, 4 restaurants, and a catering service; and a large player in the cleaning sector in Paraguay with 900 employees. We selected these three companies belonging to the same network due to the solidarity mission that they are pursuing internally and within the community in which they are located. More specifically, we selected them to explore the development and experience of a solidarity culture.

Not all enterprises in the EoC network pursue a mission of solidarity, even though they may participate in a solidarity-based approach that consists of using their profits, whenever possible, as an instrument of redistribution in the service of the most disadvantaged. More than the other organizations observed, these three organizations stand out for their significant sizes and fight against poverty as their main mission within the local area in which they operate. The Philippine bank focuses on extremely poor microentrepreneurs. The South Korean bakery strives to produce a vast number of bread loaves daily, so that it can redistribute a large part of them to the poorest people in their neighborhood. Finally, the Paraguay cleaning company aims to provide stable and decent employment to unskilled people who cannot find work while delivering quality service to its customers.

We examined qualitative data from this field, with a focus on workers' experiences of solidarity practices, through semi-structured interviews (lasting between 60 and 70 minutes) with 68 members of these three organizations, which included 25 interviews at the Philippine bank, 21 interviews at the Korean bakery, and 22 interviews at the cleaning company in Paraguay. To reveal the points of view of potential solidarity actors, we endeavored to capture the voices of entrepreneurs, managers, and employees within each organization. We differentiated the profiles of entrepreneurs depending on whether they were the founders of the company or leaders from subsequent generations (the first, second, or third generation). Concerning the other profiles, we identified the exact position that each of them held (operations manager, sales manager, purchasing manager, human resources or HR manager, area manager, assistant branch manager, supervisor, customer service officer, assistant audit officer, community development specialist, purchasing agent, bank teller, baker, pastry cook, and cleaning lady). Not only did we make sure that we met with people with different functions, but we also ensured that we interviewed people from different sites (the headquarters and several bank branches, many stores and restaurants for the bakery, and the headquarters and on-site interviews for the cleaning company). Finally, we examined 39 internal documents that included organizational charts, annual reports, brochures, training files, public interventions, social impact studies, and diagnoses of donations within and outside the organization.

We began each interview with a broad question that invited the interviewees to describe their work activity and the business activity of their organization. Follow-up questions concerned further requests for additional information: "How did you get to this position?"; "What motivates you in your work?"; "What are the characteristics of your company?"; "How would you describe the culture of the company?"; and "How is the company managed?". At the end

of each interview, we asked the interviewee to define the company in one or several words. We specifically designed our interview guide to be highly flexible by not putting the questions in a systematic order, which allowed the interviewees to concentrate on what they considered their richest and most valuable work experiences.

### *Data Analysis*

Working as a research team, we started the data analysis by carefully reading and re-reading the interview transcripts, informing the analysis with different points of view, and allowing for a systematic evaluation of judgments regarding the evidence. Our discussions involved several cycles of analysis and conceptualization (cf. Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Glaser, 1978). In particular, we agreed on the importance that the different members of the three organizations gave to solidarity by implicitly and explicitly making reference to this phenomenon that is widespread in the company culture. All those times when the interviewees did not explicitly use the concept of solidarity, they evoked terms that we consider very close to this concept to describe both their work and their company. Indeed, they talked about the culture of giving, the culture of love, the logic of sharing, care for others, attention to others, mutual aid, a family spirit, friendly bonds, a relationship of trust, and collaborative and communion styles. Furthermore, when the interviewees were asked to define their company in one word, they often replied with the term “solidarity”.

There are several differences among the three organizations analyzed, for example, regarding their size, cultural environment, and company sector. Nevertheless, given the similarity of the culture of solidarity’s results in the three companies, we chose to highlight, following the multi-case theory-building approach (Eisenhardt, 2021), those aspects common to the companies, rather than trying to oppose or categorize them. Realizing that the interviewees



paid particular attention to the solidarity culture experienced in their companies, we approached the data set with two broad questions in mind: “What are the levers and signs of solidarity?” and “What are the stages of the development of solidarity?”

We thus used a thematic coding process to generate conceptual categories (Boyatzis, 1998). We first stayed close to the collected material and generated first-order categories (taking care of the neediest, helping the local community, giving and receiving managerial support, mutual aid between workers, solidarity with clients, and solidarity beyond clients), which described what our participants observed, experienced, and did in relation to solidarity. These first-level categories depicted solidarity practices that repeatedly appeared in the collected material. To ensure that they inductively emerged from the fieldwork and not from the transposition of a theoretical framework or reflection, we were particularly attentive to identifying the participants’ words and categories used to account for the phenomenon. The codification of the participants’ verbatim responses based on our first-order codes was iterative, as we preferred to examine our database several times to both verify the accuracy and relevance of our analysis and search for additional information regarding the way in which the participants talked about organizational, managerial, and behavioral levers of solidarity. These subthemes, which we call first-order categories, relate to the main objective pursued and to the organizations’ internal connections and external links with their clients and partners. Consequently, we reorganized these notions into broader second-order categories (Feldman, 1995), which we labeled as follows: construction of the solidarity mission, internal solidarity, and external solidarity. Since we described external solidarity as a result of both the solidarity mission and the internal solidarity, we consider these second-order categories as the following stages of the development of the culture of solidarity: (a) constructing the solidarity mission, (b) sharing solidarity (internal solidarity), and (c) disseminating solidarity (external

solidarity). Although we quickly agreed about the multiplicity of the signs and levers of solidarity, further discussion was necessary to discern these developmental steps of the culture of solidarity.

## **Results**

Several signs of solidarity development emerged from our results, which ranged from the construction of the solidarity mission to the dissemination of solidarity. The construction of the solidarity mission was based on some entrepreneurs' inspirations that they revealed to us but was also enriched by a set of solidarity practices that the interviewees described.

### ***The Construction of a Solidarity Mission***

We observed that the entrepreneurs decided to accomplish a solidarity mission through their companies after experiencing some significant events that deeply touched their lives. For example, the entrepreneur who created the cleaning company explained that she held a position in a major bank in Paraguay. She became aware of her vocation when, in her office as a bank manager, she had to throw away the curriculum vitae of unqualified candidates. Touched by those who are excluded from society because they have no qualifications, she started looking around for a project. She then noticed the women cleaning her office as she left it, shocked at the way they were treated:

I saw the cleaning ladies being poorly paid, poorly advised, and poorly doing their job. They were constantly complaining. [...] So that's when I started to listen, to be interested in how they did their job. And then, thinking about the people around me, I started to think that I could give them training, pay [them] on time, [and] understand them and their needs [...]. (First-generation entrepreneur, cleaning company)

Moved by this inspiration, she has progressively developed a company that employed exclusively women from slum areas who would otherwise have had no chance of getting a job. Despite extremely unfavorable legislation, she declares their work while offering them numerous social benefits such as social security, social service, bonuses, and medical examinations, as two interviewees emphasized:

Every month, always, [I] get paid. And I have social security, social service, I have a family bonus that is paid to me for my children. Also, at the end of each month, a doctor comes for some gynecological exams. (Supervisor, cleaning company)

Moreover, I have many things, thanks to my company, for example, domestic appliances. I have everything for my house. (Cleaner, cleaning company)

Similarly, in the Philippines, a married couple—a lawyer and a political journalist who shared a passion for social justice—were asked by the wife’s father to take over a local family bank. Nothing predestined them to enter the banking sector; but the couple freely decided to seize this opportunity to orient the bank towards serving the poorest by supporting microenterprises and microcredit activities:

We were convinced that by supporting this sector, we could have an impact on economic development: increased household income, employment growth, empowerment of rural women, better educational opportunities for youth, and many other secondary benefits for people living in the countryside. (Second-generation entrepreneur, bank)

To contribute to the development of the local economy, the bank offers microcredit and access to insurance, home loans, and entrepreneurial training to the poorest clients who have no financial guarantee.

Finally, a couple who had fled North Korea because of the war, who had promised to “[live] for others in case of survival”,—and who had received a sack of flour in their new land, South Korea, decided to make bread for the poorest to keep their promise. Their children and grandchildren continue to distribute all unsold items to the poorest at the end of every day. They do not hesitate to produce many more loaves of bread than they think they can sell to give some to those who are impoverished:

We do a lot to help. We bake more bread to be able to give to people who can't afford it, to social centers, homes for the elderly, or orphanages. (Pastry cook, bakery)

Hence, the three entrepreneurs developed a mission of solidarity which consisted of allowing particularly deprived people to have access to a dignified life by offering them a job, a loan, or bread. All members of the organization supported this mission of solidarity. By being witnesses or actors of the solidarity implemented for the poorest, such members can observe the benefits of solidarity for all. For this reason, some of them used “solidarity” to define their enterprise in a single word:

Solidarity. Really. This company was created since its founder wanted to help people.

We are all people with very low economic resources. It is a solidarity company, and people here learn to be like this. (Purchasing agent, cleaning company)

### ***The Sharing of Solidarity: Development of Internal Solidarity***

Concerned with their mission of solidarity, entrepreneurs and managers practice vertical solidarity with all those they recruit into their organization while encouraging horizontal solidarity among workers.

*Vertical solidarity: Managerial support.* All the respondents mentioned that their company's "benevolent" and "friendly" management style gives them the feeling of fulfillment from being supported. They do not hesitate to compare their company to a family community, in which they do not feel "inferior" but on an equal footing with entrepreneurs who are "like them" (Area manager, bank). Several employees of the bakery also highlighted the logic of sharing existing in the company:

Our chef shares the figures with us, so all the employees can see and know how much we gave. And 15% of the profits [is] distributed every three months to the employees.  
(Pastry cook, bakery)

We found the same sharing attitude with others in the bank, as emphasized by a manager who talked about his relations with the employees:

I treat them like we're [at] the same level. Humility is important to me. Being at the top doesn't mean you're always the intelligent one. I listen to them. (Area manager, bank)

Likewise, in the cleaning company, the workers perceive the presence of a true spirit of equality among the different hierarchical levels:

We are all equal here; the entrepreneurs are with us like anyone else. To me, that's very important. They work with everyone, deal with everyone, [and] no detail escapes them. (Purchasing manager, cleaning company)

We let them know that the way we treat them [the employees] is how] we would like them to [treat] others. They are the face of the company. We teach them respect [and] solidarity. (HR manager, cleaning company)

Despite the high number of employees, each cleaner is known personally by all managers:

Most companies are not like this one. Because I worked for another cleaning company. [...] They're not like that anywhere else, no matter how you work. Here, we matter to them. They know us. There are many cleaners, but they know each of us, seriously. (Cleaner, cleaning company)

Some employees from the same company also shared the feeling of being supported in their personal lives, especially when they faced material or organizational difficulties, legal issues, or health problems:

A flood came and I lost all my stuff. I had no bed, no clothes . . . nothing. The company bought me everything. They gave me a check to help me. (Supervisor, cleaning company)

My two babies were very sick. They couldn't [be fed] anymore. I had to miss a lot of work since they had to be hospitalized 19 times in one year. I had no money to pay for the medication. They bought them for me. (HR manager, cleaning company)

Another feature that is common to all three organizations is that the entrepreneurs are personally involved in all aspects of the business, especially the activity with clients, which allows them to appreciate the difficulty of the work and to support the employees in providing

quality service. The entrepreneurs themselves “started from the bottom to build something so great” (Cleaner, cleaning company). They were the ones who, at the start of the activity, cleaned up after the first clients, met the first micro-entrepreneurs in distress to offer them microcredits, and baked the first loaves to give to the neediest.

Vertical solidarity is also demonstrated by hiring people in vulnerable situations, with low levels of qualification or with disabilities: “Many of us, many women, have not finished school. We have to work so that our children can study. We are well paid and we are valued” (Cleaner, cleaning company). Since “technical skills can be learned and values are more difficult to learn”, managers prefer candidates whose values are consistent with those of the entrepreneurs and who will be able “to flourish” within the organization (HR manager, bank). In relation to this, the bank organizes some seminars to allow its employees “to reflect on themselves as workers”:

That the company creates a budget for that, to reflect, to relax, is super! Knowing that it’s a bank! I had done retreats when I was in elementary school [...] and now, in a bank! It’s great to have a management that values that. (Audit department employee, bank)

Thus, the selection processes are based less on qualifications and experience and more on motivation and values:

A management system [that] is based solely on the [pursuit of] profit lacks [...] harmony, it must take into account all dimensions. [...] When you love, you make better bread. When relationships are not good, the bread is never as good. (First-generation entrepreneur, bakery)

*Horizontal solidarity: Mutual aid between workers.* Most of the interviewees said that within their organization, workers are “brothers and sisters” (Community development specialist, bank) or “friends” (Sales manager, bakery). In a “workplace as loving as possible” (Pastry cook, bakery), employees freely and spontaneously help each other: “When one of us is not feeling very well, the colleagues try to get him or her some medicine as soon as possible” (Pastry cook, bakery). Similarly, “When one of the employees had a fire in his house, the company helped him, the team gave a contribution. This reciprocal help is not an obligation; I liked that” (Sales manager, bakery).

This horizontal solidarity can also be advocated as a means of recruitment: members of the organization can be asked to offer jobs to people whom they know or to their family members who might need them. This process favors both personal and professional mutual aid between workers:

It helps because they take care of each other. For example, two brothers work in the company. This means that if one of them is absent, the other takes care of his work. They help each other to keep their commitments. (First-generation entrepreneur, cleaning company)

This culture of “love” is explicitly promoted by the management of the South Korean bakery, who encourage the employees to report the acts of “love” they witnessed or carried out via the company’s weekly newspaper:

Instead of evaluating [our] job performance and [our] capacity [to make] profit, we are evaluated for our love. This makes me think. I didn’t used to care about other people, except for my friends and family, to give back to people. This system made me change. (Pastry cook, bakery)



This peer review, which aims to highlight solidarity in both speech and action, produced astonishment in its early stages. In 2018, however, hundreds of acts of love over the previous year were transcribed in a book that fostered a general awareness of the culture of “love” and solidarity: “Some people may have loved in a forced way, but when you read the book, you really feel the love” (Baker, bakery). Even if this device risks creating artificial solidarity, “a feigned love” and a “hiding of negative things” (HR manager, bakery), it remains that “when we write the articles, the love grows in us” (HR manager, bakery), and that “even a little forced love ends up transforming people” (Second-generation entrepreneur, bakery). The increasing number of reported acts of love over the years suggests that there is good adherence to the system despite initial reluctance. Thus, even when acts of solidarity are based on institutional discourses, solidarity seems to remain a freely and fully lived reality and not an artificial construction:

At first, it was weird. I didn't understand; that's why it was strange. I started listening and working. I experienced the community in the company. And just like that, without realizing it, I understood. They didn't make me understand by force; I experienced this by myself. (Baker, bakery).

By witnessing and experiencing internal solidarity, the members of the three organizations feel the need to spread solidarity both with clients and with other vulnerable individuals even beyond the organizational boundaries.

### ***The Dissemination of Solidarity: Development of External Solidarity***

*The first circle of external solidarity: Solidarity with clients.* Disseminating the solidarity mission beyond the company's borders, which also includes the clients, represents the

accomplishment of the entrepreneurs' vocation, as highlighted in one of the companies' sales brochures:

To our clients, we extend our greatest gratitude, since you have allowed us to accomplish our very first objective: being entrepreneurs and creating new jobs. See our collaborators as members of your family who care about your workplace, since our slogan is the following: "We dedicate our job to people who spend most of their time in their workplace". (Cleaning company, sales brochure)

The various participants in the solidarity project said they do not hesitate to carry out the tasks assigned to them with the greatest care, as well as those that they consider relevant to their organization's mission. For example, the employees of the bank in the Philippines who are assigned to the microfinance department are called "community development specialists" because a large part of their activity consists of traveling around the territory to accompany micro-entrepreneurs in a concrete way:

I understood that my work is a vocation. It's about the desire to help the poorest, the poorest of the poor, those who really need financial assistance to create small activities to enable them to feed their families. [...] I could be an instrument for these women to survive! (Community development specialist, bank)

Several workers also manifested their caring attitudes toward clients by claiming the following:

Caring consists of loving your own job, your colleagues, and your clients. There are many ways to care. When you care, you become able to see beyond yourself. (Sales employee, bakery)

Nothing special, just taking care of your colleagues and of your clients—that is, of people who need help. This is the most important of our company values. (Sales manager, bakery).

This support benefits each member of the clients' respective families, with whom the interviewees form close ties, taking part in family celebrations and organizing family activities: "I really consider them my own family, and they accept me as a friend, a member of the family" (Community development specialist, bank). The members of the bank have observed how clients who were living in extreme poverty have been able to access decent housing and send their children to university: "I see how people have changed their lives, and they recognize the bank as the instrument that has helped them change their lives" (Community development specialist, bank).

The members of these three organizations expressed pride in contributing to an activity that is oriented toward the neediest: "Not only thinking about yourself but also doing good for the community. We know that the bread goes somewhere to help people. It gives me pride to work here" (Pastry cook, bakery). They expressed not only the joy of participating in a mission of solidarity but also the joy of welcoming the gratitude expressed by the beneficiaries:

The bank allows you to help people. They tell you: "Thank you, thank you" When you hear them say thank you like that, telling you that "you had a great role in making their dream come true", it is too much happiness. (Community development specialist, bank)

Since all the interviewees have experienced this joy, they manage to practice solidarity more regularly in their relationships with clients. For example, bakery employees do not hesitate to give a small discount when they receive elderly clients or students who are not sure that they have the money to pay for what they have chosen. Seeking to apply the bakery's motto of 'doing the good for all,' they become aware that solidarity can be practiced in their daily work. Referring to the motto, a young baker says, 'I realized that it was much more than I had imagined. Anybody, in fact, can take the initiative to help someone else' (Sales employee, bakery). He also mentions the fact that some employees go so far as to supplement with their own money what is missing for the planned purchase when the discount is not enough.

Solidarity as attention to the most vulnerable people benefits both clients and other categories of individuals. These logics of solidarity that go beyond the boundaries of the organization are intertwined. One baker explains that because he manages to make and share bread as part of his business, he has become able to do the same activity outside the bakery on a voluntary basis: 'We have a team in the company that does volunteer work in orphanages and with teenagers. We form three teams: One plays soccer with them, others clean the place, [and] others prepare dinner to share with them. We talk with them. Once a month, we go there with our colleagues' (Purchasing agent, bakery). Therefore, the practices both of sharing of internal solidarity with colleagues and of dissemination of external solidarity with clients give impetus to further solidarity practices turned toward other beneficiaries, which we call in this study 'other circles of external solidarity' and will describe in what follows.

*The other circles of external solidarity.* The micro-entrepreneurs to whom loans are granted, generally women, who can thus produce and sell food or handicraft goods in their neighborhood or on the roadside, practice solidarity among themselves to ensure the

repayment of their borrowed funds: “[Our clients] help each other and thus, learn together to manage their small capital” (Community development specialist, bank). This mutual aid between clients is an opportunity for those who have managed to get out of poverty, thanks to their entrepreneurial activity, to feel responsible for the other micro-entrepreneurs.

Furthermore, appropriating the culture of solidarity, most of the interviewees participate in collective solidarity actions that go beyond what is expected. For example, 86% of the employees of the Philippine bank voluntarily participate with their clients in the “eco-brick” action (recycling plastic waste into bricks used for humanitarian actions). Some of them also carry out voluntary actions with the poorest in their free time by involving their own families:

I participate with my children in the outreach program so that they [would] open their minds from an early age to help others. [...] They try to help their classmates by giving them school supplies when they need them. I am happy about that. [...] I am very proud that they have adopted the culture that we have here in the company. (Assistant branch manager, bank)

The solidarity actions of the company have also been replicated in the personal life choices of many employees:

I didn’t grow up in a rich family; we didn’t earn a lot. I wanted to share but we didn’t have enough to share. I really wanted to help, but our resources were not enough. I had the chance to do it here, and it really affected me. [...] What matters most is what I give to others. I have this principle in life and this bank has helped me to do it. I do volunteer work myself. (Audit department employee, bank)

Even in Korea, where employees have only a few days off, they nevertheless organize themselves to freely volunteer together at social centers and associations:

I thought I don't have time; I have a lot of work. At first, I couldn't manage to volunteer. But since last year, I [have been going] to a center that welcomes children who can't live with their parents, to play with them and cook for them. I start with small things. I would like to make everyone happy [...]. (Baker, bakery)

These solidarity initiatives were described as authentic, spontaneous, and free impulses from which the members of the organization derive a direct benefit: "We started with a few [members]; now, we are about thirty. It has been spontaneous. [In giving] to others, we experience that we receive much more" (Customer service officer, bakery).

The interviewees justify these practices of solidarity by the joy of giving and supporting the most vulnerable people. They express a sense of gratitude to all the participants in the solidarity project, but especially to those thanks to whom they experience solidarity: 'If we are so great, it is because of these small entrepreneurs who help us in what we are today. We only give back what they give us' (Second-generation entrepreneur, bank). They share the belief that what is given 'will always be rewarded' (First-generation entrepreneur, cleaning company) and that 'If you give, you receive double' (Second-generation entrepreneur, cleaning company). This confidence in the benefits of solidarity for others and for oneself leads them to actively participate in the mission of solidarity.

We summarize the aforementioned results in Table 1 by providing illustrative examples derived from our data.

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Insert Table 1 about here.

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## **Discussion**

Our study, by depicting how the culture of solidarity began and develops in the featured companies, establishes it as a possible reality and captures how solidarity can be facilitated or encouraged within organizations. In particular, we highlight the development of a solidarity mission, certain friendly managerial practices, and other-oriented spontaneous behaviors that go beyond organizational boundaries, which can be interpreted as signs and levers of the culture of solidarity. However, the culture of solidarity cannot be reduced to only these common features; it is also based on a collective process the developmental stages of which are the core results of our investigation.

### ***The Culture of Solidarity: A Three-Stage Dynamic Process***

In unveiling the developmental process of solidarity within and beyond the organization, our research avoids the trap of a fixed vision of the factors of solidarity. This process is initiated by the inspirational and charismatic behavior of entrepreneurs who define a mission to which the various members of the organization adhere. Their exemplary practices directly benefit the internal members of the organization, who adopt similar behaviors with their coworkers and with their clients. In doing so, solidarity benefits not only the internal members of the organizations but also the external ones, particularly the clients, who, in turn, participate in this culture of mutual aid (e.g., through mutual support between clients and participation in some activities with the employees to help the poorest). This propagation of solidarity is based on different stances described in our study: the attention of entrepreneurs and managers to the needs of the most vulnerable people, their need to share the solidarity project with the

internal members of the organizations, the need of the latter to give in their turn both to the clients and to the local community what they witness or benefit from, and the need to give back to the organization what they receive. This consideration of acts of solidarity awakens a collective feeling of gratitude, which becomes the driving force behind the process of spreading solidarity. Therefore, the culture of solidarity is based on a positive spiral in which the internal and external members of the organizations actively participate. Fig. 1 depicts the dynamic process that characterizes the culture of solidarity: (a) construction of the solidarity mission, (b) sharing of solidarity, and (c) dissemination of solidarity.

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Insert Fig. 1 about here.

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From this research, we draw a number of practical lessons on the organizational and managerial conditions for fostering a culture of solidarity. We observed that these organizations are rooted in a local community and try to respond to the essential needs of the most disadvantaged people in that community. Furthermore, their founders, together with both the second- and third-generation entrepreneurs, encourage support for employees and their families and give more importance to motivation than to qualification. Yet, they also promote mutual aid, personal support, and friendship with clients and welcome all spontaneous impulses of solidarity that go beyond their ordinary business activities.

How, then, can we explain the effectiveness of these solidarity dynamics and the real participation in this culture of solidarity by each of the parties involved? The culture of giving is part of the answer: just as the logic of gift leads to generalized reciprocity (Bruni, 2008; Faldetta, 2011), it is strongly foreseeable that a mission focused on the most vulnerable people encourages the participation of everyone in a culture of solidarity. By being a



beneficiary or witness of solidarity, each internal or external member—whom we call a “contributing part”—can experience what Fehr et al. (2017) described as collective gratitude, that is, “a stable tendency to feel grateful within a particular context that is shared by the members of an organization” (p. 363). It may be that this shared sense of gratitude greatly increases the collective willingness to contribute to solidarity. Not only does our study highlight the deeply relational dimension of solidarity, but it also suggests “unconditional reciprocity” (Bruni, 2008), that is, the confidence that by giving, we are participating in a mechanism from which we will reap benefits. That is, the providers of solidarity do not obtain an immediate and expected counter gift from the direct beneficiaries but participate in a dynamic that goes beyond material and interindividual reciprocity—that is, generalized cooperation or reciprocity (Alter, 2009; Bruni, 2008; Caillé and Grésy, 2014; Emmons and McCullough, 2004; Fehr et al., 2017)—from which they believe they will reap the future benefits.

### ***Theoretical Contributions***

Our study enriches research on solidarity from a common good perspective in that it took a practical turn by erecting the common good as a compass for management (Melé, 2003), for organizations (Frémeaux and Michelson, 2017), and for certain professions (Frémeaux et al., 2020). In particular, our study made visible a *practical solidarity* that Gallagher and Buckeye (2014) claimed is “both an ideal and a practical ethos. [...] What could be more practical than funneling business profits to those in need?” (p. 174). By focusing on the mechanism of solidarity, our study clarified how common-good-oriented organizations can encourage a culture of solidarity based on (1) an awareness of the interdependence of their members and (2) the common desire to respond to the most essential needs of each of them and of others who would join the community by having the same motivation. Therefore, we showed how

solidarity, similar to the common good, far from being an abstract concept, can be conceived as both an individual and collective experience. In this perspective, solidarity is not only understood as respect for a philosophical and moral principle, nor even as a habitually practiced virtue (MacIntyre, 1999; Weil, 1952), but is experienced as a self-evident fact that springs to mind regardless of the individuals' moral convictions. It is through the test of reality that suspicions about solidarity are dispelled and that democratic solidarity resulting from "an unconstrained choice, deliberately and consciously made by individuals" (Ahmed, 2015, p. 429) is built.

Indeed, despite some skeptical reactions shown by some mostly entry-level workers, we observed that this experience is not constrained or imposed by the entrepreneurs. On the contrary, it is free, eliciting a strong adhesion from the different contributing parts and spontaneous initiatives that exceed what is expected. Furthermore, this experience is not instrumentalized, recuperated by the management for power and financial performance, or accomplished by the participants to reinforce their image as benefactors. On the contrary, this experience is *authentic*, shared by the people interviewed as a mission that gives meaning to their lives and even offers them the possibility of developing human qualities. This experience is also not sacrificial; it is *fulfilling* because participation in a mission of solidarity is a source of immediate joy but also the sign of the culture of mutual aid that benefits everyone. In other words, we demonstrated how workers' experience of solidarity can lead to their human flourishing, as anticipated by several business ethics scholars from a theoretical perspective (Audi, 2012; Guitián and Sison, 2022; Hartman, 2008; Solomon, 2004).

This three-stage process is a relevant contribution to the solidarity literature from a common-good perspective for three reasons. First, by considering not only practices but also a culture,

we observe that solidarity can be a dynamic process concerning a heterogeneous set of individuals, initiators, participants, or beneficiaries that gravitates around the solidarity project. Second, solidarity is not reduced to fixed acts intended to respond to the needs of the deprived and to give them access to a dignified life, but it also results from a succession of steps that deserve to be consolidated every day. Third, this study provides some empirical evidence that solidarity, conceived as a path toward the common good, can be a source of comfort and well-being for the beneficiaries, third parties, and project leaders. Taken together, these remarks allow us to glimpse a non-exclusively normative interpretation of the notion and to emphasize the culture of solidarity. This latter idea allows each worker to participate in the common good, having the necessary goods and services for a dignified life while trusting in the benefits of solidarity for everyone.

The culture of solidarity is based on the development of a community of people who have forged bonds of friendship and welcome all those who wish to join them directly or indirectly. This community of people does not seek a balance between concern for others and concern for the self but believes in the consubstantiality and co-extensiveness of solidarity toward both the others and the self. In brief, solidarity toward the self cannot be thought of as separate from solidarity toward others (Gutián and Sison, 2022) and vice versa. By making the beneficiaries the most effective promoters of solidarity (in our study, the neediest help those poorer than they are), the culture of solidarity constitutes the best bulwark against the development of asymmetrical and dependent relationships.

As a result, participating in a culture of solidarity can be an ethical dimension of meaningful work. Our study enriches the discussion on meaningful work by considering, in addition to the classical components of meaning, such as learning and development opportunities,

autonomy, recognition, positive relationships, and social purpose (Berthoin Antal et al., 2018; Morin, 2008), the process by which people experience an “authentic connection between their work and a broader transcendent life purpose beyond the self” (Bailey and Madden, 2016, p. 2). It may be that ethical behaviors, such as solidarity actions, contribute to this meaning-making process; echoing the literature connecting meaningful work and business ethics (Michaelson et al., 2014), it may even be that the establishment of a culture of solidarity constitutes a condition allowing managers to foster meaningful work.

### *Limitations and New Directions*

Just as with the gift (Sherry et al., 1993) or the common good (Frémeaux, 2020; Sison and Fontrodona, 2012), solidarity may have a dark side in that others may judge the culture of solidarity as idealistic, misleading, or even dangerous. Nevertheless, the hypothesis of real solidarity cannot be dismissed a priori; reinterpreting acts of solidarity in a systematic way as coerced, instrumental, or sacrificial actions, and thereby denying the very nature of solidarity, is potentially a source of dehumanization. Indeed, criticism of solidarity action as artifice, deception, or self-sacrifice deprives individuals of their dignity—that is, of access to the deeper meaning of their acts or even of the opportunity to perform the acts they need to fulfill.

Future research can build on our approach and explore other organizations that might focus on the poorest individuals but also all other forms of exclusion. It may be that these organizations are less inclined to engage in solidarity than the three companies described in this study for two reasons. First, they could be rooted in cultural environments that are distinctive from the Asian and South American contexts in which we conducted our investigation, which are particularly conducive to mutual aid and not facilitating the workers’ voice (Elvira and Davila, 2005; Lee, 2012). Second, these organizations could pursue a more conventional

mission of producing goods and services. If the mission of these organizations does not consist of providing solidarity or is not driven by solidarity entrepreneurs, the question remains as to whether the culture of solidarity can be instilled by the initiative of some other members of these organizations. It is possible that these future investigations will turn out to be counterexamples of the culture of solidarity, which would consolidate our thesis that the development of the culture of solidarity presupposes a demanding set of organizational and managerial conditions. Furthermore, solidarity is certainly easier to implement in small and medium-sized organizations or in those located in communities sharing a culture of giving. For this reason, it may not be possible to develop a culture of solidarity in multinational companies with a high degree of cultural diversity; not only would they find it difficult to reconcile ethical norms with differences across cultures, but they might also fail to uphold the most basic ethical norms, such as respecting people's rights and the enactment of better labor conditions (Gutián and Sison, 2022).

Another limitation of our study is that it focused on organizations and, as a result, neglected the role of political bodies in solidarity. Regarding organizations as actors of mutual aid can mechanically obscure the precious role of states or even reduce states' responsibilities in the area of solidarity. We believe that the two forms of solidarity—"institutionalized solidarity", that is, essentially, solidarity imposed by the state through taxes (Schlag and Mercado, 2012), and relational solidarity—are not mutually exclusive but can enrich each other. It may also be that a society can only achieve humanization if political institutions care about the most vulnerable (MacIntyre, 1999) and support entities that help the most vulnerable through their work—which most vulnerable Fleury (2018) calls "the irreplaceable". Future research could explore the complementarities between solidarity measures put in place by states and the relational solidarity that emerges spontaneously in work communities. In particular, the

question arises as to how state regulation can encourage workers to develop solidarity missions without focusing on one form of enterprise or one form of solidarity, or even without falling into the opposite trap of disempowering the state in this area. These incentives, which already exist in some countries (see, for example, the social and solidarity economy in France), are not a guarantee of the development of relational solidarity. Indeed, as we showed in this study, relational and generalized solidarity obeys a particular developmental process that may be influenced by legal and financial logics but remains distinct from them.

Other future studies could be inspired by our work to shed light on the interrelations between relational solidarity and “ecological solidarity” (Thompson et al., 2011). How can human beings build solidarity among themselves without developing solidarity with the other components of the living world of which they are an integral part? Such a perspective would profoundly change the common good approach to solidarity from being centered on interdependence of human beings (Arjoon et al., 2018; Donati, 2008) to interdependence of living beings with their natural environment. The culture of solidarity would be nourished by the passive observation of the community of destiny shared by all living elements and the active will to reduce our human footprint on natural systems. This positive perspective on solidarity would make it possible to escape from an anthropocentric worldview while maintaining a humanist approach to the common good, expressed for a long time by certain philosophers (De Koninck, 1997), whereby human beings can only be ordered to the common good if they remain in their place in the order of the universe.

Finally, our work should not surprise the community of researchers reading this paper. If we take a benevolent look at our own research experiences, we will observe that by assisting doctoral students, participating in thesis juries, completing article reviews, providing

spontaneous feedback to researchers, and sharing our reflections in more accessible media, we are performing acts of trust and hope that benefit others and ourselves. In relation to this, we encourage scholars to investigate in their future research the benefits that both they and others derive from solidarity relationships—based on interdependence—within and beyond their own established or spontaneous work communities.

## **Conclusion**

Our study examined the signs and levers of the culture of solidarity and conceived such culture as a three-step dynamic process of (a) the construction of a mission of solidarity, (b) the sharing of solidarity with internal members of the organization, and (c) the dissemination of solidarity to external members of the organization. We further found that this process is constantly renewed and strengthened through the actions of all the participants. The relational solidarity discussed in this work turned out to be free, authentic, and fulfilling. Based on trust and on the belief that what we give to others indirectly benefits us as well, this solidarity transcends coercion, resists all instrumentalization and manipulation attempts, and is, in essence, by no means sacrificial. Accordingly, widespread solidarity allows individuals to develop both freedom and virtue (Cremers, 2017) and to pursue the highest end that a human person can achieve—“eudaimonia”, according to Aristotle, which is usually translated as “eudaemonic joy” (Deci and Ryan, 1985; Tablan, 2015), “happiness” or “flourishing”.

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**Table 1.** Signs and levers of the culture of solidarity.

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Subthemes</b>	<b>Data extracts</b>
Constructing the solidarity mission	Taking care of the neediest	“In our company, we recruit people who need to work” (First-line entrepreneur, cleaning company)
	Helping the local community	“It’s a devotion to help others. When you see the clients progress, their lifestyle, their children going to school all the way, their home improved because of the loan . . . I am happy” (Community development specialist, bank)
Sharing solidarity	Giving and receiving managerial support	“They trusted me. I never felt like I wasn’t at home here; it’s still a home for me. They have trained me. They share your worries, your joys, they take care of the personal aspects, they help you deal with your personal problems. So far, it has always been like that, from the first day” (Area manager, bank)
	Mutual aid between workers	“The first reason I like working here is the people, how they love each other. I like to work with this kind of people. When we do something beautiful, we congratulate each other; if it’s not going well, we worry together. We feel like a family here” (Sales manager, bakery)
Disseminating solidarity	Solidarity with clients	“We should be writing to our most loyal customers, not to them! We are all grateful to them!” (Sales employee, bakery)
	Solidarity beyond clients	“They are earmarking a fund for this, to help people. It’s all in the budget. We don’t touch that fund! And they respect the limits of that fund” (Accountant, cleaning company)

**Figure 1.** Stages of development of the culture of solidarity.

