Chapter 4
Facilitating a Meaningful Work Situation—A Double-Edged Sword?

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For employees in today's society, work fulfils a wide range of functions. Work is not only important in terms of invome, it is also a source of identity, of positive self-image and a sense of meaningfulness (Alvesson, 2001; Noon & Blyton, 2007; Wrzesniewski, LoBuglio, Dutton, & Berg, 2013). In a well-known study, a large number of individuals from different countries were asked the so-called lotto question (MOW—International Research Team, 1987). When being presented with the scenario of winning a large sum of money whereby they would not have to work due to financial needs, an overwhelming number of respondents answered that they would continue working. Another study conducted in America investigated individuals who actually won large lottery sums and found that 86% of the winners still continued working (Arvey, Harpaz, & Liao, 2004).

The fact that working is central to well-being and that it helps to create meaning in people's lives is reflected in well-developed welfare states, such as Norway. Throughout history, the understanding of "meaning" has had an impact on how Norwegian working life has developed, as well as on how work today is organized. In the 1970s, Thorsrud and Emery (1970) established a list of "psychological job demands" with the criteria: co-determination, variation and value of the job that were thought to be a source of meaningful working life. These criteria have, in turn, influenced Norwegian law. A preamble (§ 1-1a) to the Working Environment Act states that the law shall "secure a working environment that provides a basis for a health promotion and for meaningful working situation" (Norwegian Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2005).

It can be argued that experiencing work as meaningful may be triggered by, as well as lead to, increased employee work engagement. Although meaningful work

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has hot been clearly defined (Cartwright & Holmes, 2006; but see next section), the essence of meaning is "connection" (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002). Viewing one's work as meaningful and worthwhile has been linked to a range of positive outcomes including a stronger drive to engage with it (Cartwright & Holmes, 2006). In turn, work engagement has been associated with a range of positive outcomes in the organization (Christian, Garza, & Slaughter, 2011; Salanova, Agut, & Peiró, 2005; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2009). Many organizations, therefore, conduct different interventions with the intention of promoting work engagement, and in recent times there has been a growth of "artistic" organizational interventions (Darsø, 2006).

If meaning is viewed as "connection", then artistic interventions, such as choir singing at work and the act of directing an orchestra as part of leadership programmes, may be particularly suitable to stimulate engagement and meaning creation among employees, because they aim to trigger not only thought processes, or cognitions, but also emotions (Darsø, 2006, 2009; Simpson & Marshall, 2010). Art processes are also recognized as being particularly powerful when it comes to releasing creativity, innovation and energy (Wennes, 2006). In addition, there is empirical evidence that suggests that participation in cultural activities may promote well-being, engagement and positive health outcomes (e.g. Bygren et al., 2009a, b; Bygren, Konlaan, & Johansson, 1996; Cuypers et al., 2011). Choral singing has, for instance, been found to contribute to a positive environment, social cohesion, and increased well-being both in the workplace and in the community (Giæver, Vaag, & Wennes, 2016; Clift & Hancox, 2010; Purcell & Kagan, 2007; Dunbar, Kaskatis, Macdonald, & Barra, 2012). Such interventions can help to enhance the meaning and experience of work.

In this chapter, we explore how meaningful work can be facilitated. First, we explain what is meant by meaningful work. Second, we examine artistic interventions as an organizational strategy for facilitating and stimulating a meaningful working situation. Finally, we discuss the concept of meaning and if striving for meaning is actually desired, or should be desired, by all employees, and at all times.

4.1   Defining Meaningful Work

For the present purpose, meaningful work is defined as three interrelated dimensions. First, as a positive psychological state whereby people feel they make a positive, important, and useful contribution to a worthwhile purpose through the execution of their work (Albrechts, 2013, p. 239); second, as "connection" (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002), coherence and belonging; third, as an alignment of one's values and purpose or, according to Chalofsky (2003), an "integrated wholeness", which is close to the concept of intrinsic motivation. The extent to which work is perceived as meaningful relies not only on subjective experiences, but also on what the individual does to create these experiences and how the

psychosocial work environment or culture of the workplace promotes these experiences. This integrated perspective also links well with the four factors implicit to meaningful work identified by Schnell, Höge and Pollet (2013): direction, significance, belonging and coherence.

Making a contribution links clearly to the concept of direction in that it refers to alignment between the individual and the organization's goals, values and norms (Schnell et al., 2013; Kamp, 2012). For example, when the organization is making the case of having a positive impact on clients and customers (Ravn, 2008) a sense of meaningfulness is facilitated among employees. Furthermore, it is essential for employees to experience their leaders as credible and authentic in order for them to accept and share the organization's goals and values (Schnell et al., 2013).

Significance is also about making a contribution as it refers to the ways in which employees perceive that they can make a difference and have impact in the organization and in society overall, something which implies alignment between specific work tasks and the organization's overarching goals (Schnell et al., 2013). Considering that work is increasingly characterized by autonomy, flexibility, and knowledge-based jobs, it can be argued that more pressure is put on the individual employee when it comes to defining the content of his/her job, and hence also meaningfulness (Ravn, 2008).

Making a contribution can also be linked to belonging, or a sense of attachment to a community or the workplace (Schnell et al., 2013), as this is a two-way process whereby the employee is not only drawn to a certain community/workplace, but also actively contributes to its existence. Employees do, however, experience a greater emotional attachment to their work when the culture and formal structure of the organizations facilitate open communication with headroom for constructive conflicts, participation, common trust, as well as support and respect among the workers and the management (Pircher Verdorfer, Weber, Unterrainer, & Seyr, 2012). These characteristics of the work culture are conceptualized as the socio-moral work environment (Weber, Unterrainer, & Schmid, 2009) and have been shown to bolster experienced meaningful work (Schnell et al., 2013). In addition, it has been shown that there is a positive relationship between meaning in work and having appreciative and trustworthy colleagues, as well as supportive management (May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004).

Finally, experiencing cohesion refers to the experience of alignment between one's self-concept and work role (Schnell et al., 2013), something in which also links to make a contribution as this is something in which the individual employee can actively work towards. Hence, if there is a match between the employee's self-concept and the work role it is also easier for the individual to express ideas, values and inner strengths (Schnell et al., 2013) and to experience meaningfulness (Ravn, 2008; May et al., 2004).

With regards to the subjective component of experiences of meaningfulness, it has been argued that work can be viewed either as a job, a career or a calling (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997). Employees who see work as a job are mostly concerned with making money and with material goods.

Employees who see work as a career, on the other hand, often have a deeper personal motivation related to climbing the career ladder, and thereby gaining a higher social status, more power and an improved sense of self-perception. Finally, employees who see work as a calling are less concerned with money and promotion, but view the work as an essential part of their personal identity and are often concerned about contributing to create a better world. There is evidence that when one views the job as a calling, it can bring great satisfaction to both the job and to life itself (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). Employees who view their job as a calling also feel more passionately about the job and report stronger emotional ties to their job (Vallerand et al., 2003).

With regards to the active component of making a contribution and enhancing meaningfulness, employees can form and redefine the content of their current job through job crafting (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). As already described in this book, job crafting can consist of crafting tasks (e.g. when one chooses to focus on some tasks rather than others), crafting relationships (e.g. choosing to avoid contact with some of the co-workers and spending more time with others) and/or cognitive crafting (e.g. looking at the job in a wider perspective).

4.2   Artistic Interventions Fostering Meaning

Arts-based methods are increasingly being adopted in order to achieve change in modern and complex organizations where the notion of meaningful work may be particularly important to employees (Adler, 2008; Koivunen & Wennes, 2011). Artistic processes can also be introduced as an intervention in organizations. There are three main types of interventions: primary, secondary and tertiary. These are aimed at preventing a problem, changing an already existing problem or treating the symptoms (Reynolds, 1997; Richardson & Rothstein, 2008). In addition to these, countervailing interventions (Kelloway, Hurrell, & Day, 2008) are characterized by a more proactive approach, where the purpose is to promote and develop positive experiences in the organization. They are, by nature, not necessarily oriented towards the content of the job, but go beyond what the job is about, i.e. with the aim of creating well-being and unity at the workplace in a more holistic way. The expectation is that such interventions can then lead to meaningful work by strengthening the sense of "connection" (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002) and an "integrated wholeness" (Chalofsky, 2003), belongingness and alignment of values. Research has shown that workplaces that support a sense of relatedness, for example, can support intrinsic motivation as part of self-determination (Karanika-Murray & Michaelides, 2015).

Arts-based methods for strengthening the meaning of work can be utilized mainly as a countervailing intervention. A central dimension concerning artistic interventions is that emotional component is especially prominent—this can strengthen the four factors implicit to meaningful work: direction, significance, belonging and coherence (Schnell et al., 2013). Artistic interventions are, in this

sense, well aligned to our multidimensional approach which views connection, belonging and an integrated wholeness as central to meaning of work.

Artistic interventions are characterized by the purpose of activating "the whole human being" (Darsø, 2006, 2009; Simpson & Marshall, 2010) whereby cognitive understanding is assumed to be important, but not enough for a deep and long-lasting change in the individual equivalent to double-loop learning (Schein, 1987). When undergoing double-loop learning underlying assumptions are made visible and questioned. In order to achieve this, change/learning the synergy between emotional, bodily and cognitive activation is essential. An emotional activation could constitute either a distinct feeling or a mood condition. Distinct feelings are defined as relatively intense, short-lived reactions to a given situation, a person or an object (Lazarus, 1999; Lazarus & Cohen-Charash, 2001). Moods, on the other hand, are less intense and do not have a particular object, but are closely related to distinct feelings (Parkinson, Totterdell, Briner, & Reynolds, 1996). One can, for example, experience a long-lasting positive mood after having experienced intense joy. Positive emotional experiences (mood and emotions), such as happiness, satisfaction and hope, often arise as a result of being presented with opportunities, achieving one's goal and living by one's norms and values (Bartunek, Rousseau, Rudolph, & DePalma, 2006). It can, therefore, be argued that experiencing a sense of meaningfulness is highly linked to positive emotional experiences and engagement. Furthermore, that artistic intervention can contribute to engagement and meaningfulness via the triggering of positive emotional experiences. Positive emotions have, for instance, been found to be associated with increased openness (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005), creativity (Isen, Daubman, & Nowicki, 1987) and pro-social and helping behaviour (George & Brief, 1992). It also appears that workplace "fun" has positive effects on individuals and is positively related to job satisfaction and customer service quality (Karl & Peluchette, 2006).

From an intervention point of view, the fact that emotional conditions are short lasting may be seen as a problem, since the intention is to create a long-lasting change in the organization. Still, there are several mechanisms through which emotional experiences may have long-lasting and more profound effects in an organization following an intervention. For instance, most organizational interventions are group- or team-based, so the moods and emotions of individuals converge through emotional contagion (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994). The term 'emotional contagion' refers to the process in which individuals automatically tend to mimic and synchronize other people's expressions, vocalizations, postures and movements. Emotional experiences may have more lasting effects as a result of this process. Furthermore, following the premise that positive emotions typically facilitate approach behaviour or continued action, due to a desire to maintain positive emotional experiences (e.g. Carver & Scheier, 1990), Fredrickson (2001) developed the "broaden-and-build" theory. This theory postulates that, although positive moods and emotions are transient and potentially only associated with short-term behavioural effects, positive emotional experiences have the capacity to expand people's thought–action repertoires. As a result of this process, individuals build and accumulate resources over time and can draw on them in the future. There is some empirical

support for this theory. For instance, positive emotional experiences have been found to build individual resilience, and to enhance engagement and well-being on both the individual and the collective levels (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005; Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Larkin, 2003; Hakanen, Bakker, & Demerouti, 2005).

4.3 Types of Artistic Interventions

There are many different types of artistic interventions, and, according to Darsø (2006, 2009) these can be categorized into four levels. Here the idea is that the more levels that are being activated, the greater the potential there is for a deeper and long-lasting learning and changing process in the organization. On the first level, art is utilized as decoration in the organization (e.g. paintings and sculptures in an open plan office), while, on the second level, employees are introduced to art as entertainment (e.g. music during the lunch break). In both of these cases, one the artistic experience may stimulate cognitive and emotional processes and associations among the employees, especially if the employees are actively participating. The process whereby employees are asked to decorate their offices may, for instance, trigger questions such as "what kind of organization is this?" and "how would we like our workplace to be presented?" On the third level, the artistic process is utilized as a method, and the employees and/or the management participate actively in an actual artistic process with the aim of achieving an outcome in the organization. Here, one example would be directing an orchestra in order to stimulate reflection about the leader role, something in which may in turn lead to changes in behaviour through job crafting and an increased sense of meaningfulness (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997; Schnell et al., 2013). The fourth level uses artistic processes as part of an overarching and long-term strategic process in the organization. This implies that the organization invests adequately and that top management believes in the effect of the intervention and express this clearly to employees, such as being expressed by this manager:

> At the end of the day I'm a hard-nosed businessman who wants to sell more washing powder. This is not a soft issue, it's a very hard issue of how you can motivate and inspire people… if I didn't think this program was pulling its weight I would cut it in a second (Darsø, 2009, p. 157).

4.4 Striving After Meaning: A Double-Edged Sword

There is wide range of evidence that introducing artistic interventions in the organization in order to foster positive emotions, engagement and a sense of meaningfulness. It can, however, be questioned whether the stimulation of meaning is always pragmatic or desirable. Could it be possible, that, for example, some employees, at different times in their life, simply wish for a "meaningless" job?

Meaningfulness at work is about making a contribution and links to the experiences of cohesion, direction, significance and belonging (Schnell et al., 2013). The individual employee can also actively contribute to create a meaningful work situation (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). However, meaning can also be created outside of work, and the experience of meaning can vary in different situations, at different points in one's life, and the experience of meaning in the job can develop over time. In the MOW project (MOW—International Research Team), meaning was explained through a model including six dimensions (Schnell et al., 2013). Here, it is worth highlighting the concept of "work centrality", which refers to how important one's job is at a given time in one's life. Hence, work can be experienced as less essential at various points in the life span, e.g. in the event of working part time due to caring for young children, however, this does not necessarily imply that the job is perceived as meaningless.

Studies have also shown that in the event of involuntary unemployment, meaningful recreational activities can compensate for the satisfaction that work would give (Waters & Moore, 2002). It may even seem as if historical, demographical, job and organizational factors, to a large extent, contribute to perceived job centrality. For example, it seems as if people in our post-industrial society generally value interesting and meaningful work, more than they value materialistic goods (Harding & Hikspoors, 1995). Additionally, several studies show that young employees are more concerned about seeking a high salary, job security and promotion opportunities, compared to older employees who are more concerned with inner rewards (Inceoglu, 2012; Smola & Sutton, 2002). This, however, varies across professions, as nurses often tend to be altruistic and interpersonally oriented in their job (De Cooman et al., 2008) and thereby see their job as a calling and as part of something greater, while industrial workers are more instrumentally oriented (Furåker & Hedenus, 2009). Furthermore, studies have found that those employees born between 1982 and 1999, who constitute the "Generation Me", value spare time more than work, and, compared to earlier generations, wish to work slower and less (Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, & Lance, 2010). It may, therefore, seem as if work is not crucial for experiencing meaning for this generation.

The centrality and experience of meaning is also something that can be developed over time. The "Generation Me", for instance, grew up in a situation whereby they to a large extent adapted to taking financial security for granted. Hence, they were allowed to immerse themselves in other activities (hobbies etc.), something in which could contribute to viewing work as less meaningful as internal motivation relies on external motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). For example, in the event of being motivated by salary and bonuses, the efforts invested in achieving goals could contribute to developing new interests and skills, something which over time can trigger motivation to further pursue new interests and skills. This process can contribute to shifting focus to internal motivation and a sense of meaningfulness, as well as different job crafting activities (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997), that may lead to an enhanced sense of meaning and wider perspectives on work. However, it can also be argued that this process evolves in the opposite direction whereby an employee who is initially altruistically

motivated and views the job as a calling, over time can experience an increasing meaninglessness as a result of exhaustion, depersonalization and burnout (Schaufeli, Leiter, & Maslach, 2008).

These processes are often triggered by organizational structures and efficiency demands. In a recent study (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009), it was, for instance, evident that although zoo keepers experienced a strong sense moral commitment and meaningfulness in the job, their spare time, economic situation and social status were negatively affected. For instance, their strong commitment to the job led them to being easily pressured and exploited at work. Hence, experiencing work as deeply meaningful can have negative consequences for the individual employee and imply a destructive dynamic at work, particularly when the goals and demands of the organization (e.g. efficiency) are opposed to the goals and demands of the individual employee (e.g. quality). A similar pattern was evident in a study of sickness presence among Norwegian hospital physicians (Giæver, Lohmann-Lafrenz, & Løvseth, 2016). Presenteeism among physicians has, for example, been linked to more mistakes, more complaints from patients and slower recovery of patients (Virtanen et al., 2009). As expected, we found that the reason the physicians still went to work while sick was largely due to structural conditions. For example, having expertise that was difficult to replace or experiencing job insecurity because they worked in temporary positions. It was evident that the physicians' mindset and compassionate behaviour contributed to maintaining structural limitations. Within this context, presenteeism was considered something positive and as having positive consequences for the physicians. Presenteeism was, for example, viewed as a strategy to handle sickness and as a source of positive professional identity and sense of dignity in their work role. This illustrates that striving for meaning could have long-term negative effects.

4.5 Concluding Thoughts: The Actors of Meaning Creation

The concept of meaning stands strong in Norwegian working life and experienced meaningfulness at work appears to be important for most people. However, considering that the experience of meaning is contextual and evolves in positive as well as negative ways over time, it would not be sensible to define meaning at a general level and then implement prescribed thoughts, ideas and behaviours in the organization. It is essential that employees themselves actively contribute to meaning creation in the organization:

> If we want people's intelligence and support, we must welcome them as co-creators. People support only what they create (Wheatley, 2001 in Darsø, 2006, p. 13)

Here the use of art, or artistic interventions, would be especially well fitted in starting this process, since the aim is to create reflection among employees and where they are active contributors to the intervention process. However, although

artistic interventions should be a bottom-up process, it is still important that the management of the organization is actively involved to ensure that individual, social and organizational needs are in balance. For example, management can impose limitations on job crafting so that is not disruptive for the workers or the organization. Management should also be open to challenging organizational goals, and how to approach these in the best possible way.

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