

# Motivation as a product of meaninglessness?

## A tentative theory for health care organizations

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### ABSTRACT

This article draws together a collection of critical ideas concerning the concepts of motivation and meaning of the individual in a cultural context. The point is to elaborate critically on the assumption of motivation taken as surrogate for meaning.

Firstly, the paper assumes that the concept of motivation is an instrument fill individual work with meaning. It does not stem from cultural or individual experience, was experience as socially constructed or not. Secondly, the paper emphasizes the value of an alternative approach that retains the strength of analysis of individual meaning in an organization. The basic assumptions of this research will arise from the ideas of existential psychology and cultural theory of organizations. In this sense continued research of meaning is likely to yield even greater understanding of behavior in organizations because an individual's behavior is based on the meaning they attach to situations. Finally, the article provides some examples from healthcare organizations and professionals and ends up a tentative theory.

**Keywords:** motivation, meaning, organization, culture and health care

### INTRODUCTION

According to researchers the core motivational propensity is the search for meaning (e.g. Maslow 1966, Maddi 1970, Deci 1975, 88, Sievers 1994, Herzberg 1995, Modi 1995). Thus peripheral motives (cf. money) are derived from this basic propensity (Deci 1975, 88). However, at the age of the big "bonus pool companies" it seems that people are motivated more by extrinsic than intrinsic rewards. At the same time, the experience

of nothingness and meaninglessness has maintained a prominent place in postmodern world (cf. Seeman 1959, Shaef-Fassel 1990). This leads to the following question: Why the meaning of meaningless has not become as capturing concept as motivation in organizations?

For Sievers (1994, 39) the answer is obvious: organizations are forced to cover up their increasing destruction of genuine meaning of work and life. Lloyd et al (1999, 87) state that it is easier for many managers to speak the language of empowerment than to try to create empowered workforces, with the fear of loss control and diffusion of responsibility. In order to suppress the quest for meaning into a private matter of the individual organizations has to use work orientated vocabulary. The concept of empowerment is supposed to serve better the aims of organization than the concepts of meaningfulness or alienation. The later ones may lead to troublesome questions: "I have no control over my life and job, haven't I? The social system is the source of my inner emptiness, isn't it? I am empowered, but am I just the slave of reification: "man produces and so himself becomes a product" (Ziegler 1982, 15).

Organization and motivation approaches in general seem to be based on scientific process of reification and its underlying fragmentation (Sievers 1994, 167). For example Deci (1975, 88) speaks of the need for self-determination, rather than the search for meaning. The concept of self-determination is also applied in organizational studies (e.g. Sundholm 2000). Naturally, the self-determination as a synonym for meaning does not lead to the following questions: does it make sense to be intrinsically motivated in organizations surrounded by the experience of nothingness? In other words, for example nurse managers who wish to empower staff nurses have to make at least structural changes in their organizations in order

to reduce reification of jobs (cf. Lashinger 1997, 349). For example Gray's (1984) findings support the importance of structural changes: seniority, rank, sex, and type of basic training have the strongest effects on job satisfaction. In the future combining these aspects in meaning and motivation is a real challenge for multi-disciplinary studies of work and life.

Evidence abounds that people are motivated by intrinsic rewards, yet this often is not taken into account when especially health care organizations, jobs, and information and control systems are designed. Through the ages sophisticated measures of motivation have also suppressed the fundamental questions of meaning in organization. Questions like: why does one work? Why work at all? How do you experience meaning in your organization? etc.

The problem may be same as concerning intrinsic motivation: meaning cannot be given by the organization (Lawler-Rhode 1976, 65). The questions of meaning can not be faced within the framework of rational organization, because it demands 'narrow-minded' action instead of fundamental discussion of meaning in life and action. Therefore it really makes sense to ask: are motivation and job satisfaction studies dead, but dominant?

If motivation is really surrogate for meaning (Sievers 1986), it is complex concept as well. Needless to say that meaning can be defined in different ways. Fortunately, it has not so many definitions as motivation has and favors causal explanations. Berger-Luckmann (1966) argues that all types of meaning are socially constructed. An individual attaches subjective meaning to all his actions. However, these writers do not focus the concept of meaning on an individual level; they see that domination of culture can provide a meaningful world for individuals to live in and that institutions dominate our construe of meaning. Heidegger (1962) encourages an individual to let go of defenses that have suppressed their experience of meaning (i.e. norms, forms and opinions of masses). According to Heidegger an individual is only able to create meaning through his authenticity, although Heidegger on the language level stressed the meaning as a social action. Frankl (1966) is convinced that meanings are unique and they are transforming all the time. The individual can achieve meaning in every situation if he is ready to change the situation by

acting or letting it be. An individual has power over his meaning of life, even if all values of culture or society disappear. To Frankl, for example, self-actualization as a variable of motivation is always the effect of meaning fulfilling - not man's ultimate destination.

This paper will explain the difference between the concepts of motivation and meaning. Especially, the paper stresses the tensions between these concepts in order to produce information of the alternatives for an empirical study of meaning. This approach has not been very popular in the studies of organizations. As researchers has stated, the ontological status of 'individual', 'group' and 'organizations has mostly gone unexamined while these images continue to inadequately capture the lived experience in organizations. To concede the holistic individual is replaced with presenting only a partial or incomplete view of the individual (Carr-Pihlanto 1996, 13-19, cf. Herzberg 1995, Morin 1995).

## A CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF MOTIVATION STUDIES

In the field of organizational behavior the ideas of motivation and job satisfaction have been the most important research area throughout the ages. The main point of this area of research field has been the question how to integrate the individual and the organization. Studies have focused on the problems of motivation, job satisfaction, job characteristics, job attitudes etc. (see Argyris 1957, 1964, Meltzer 1960, Blacker-Shimmin 1984, Drenth et al 1985). The list of these concepts are almost endless and they seem to live their own life in the texts of organization theory. It can be said that these concepts justifies themselves by the enormous amount of studies (cf. Sanderland-Drazin 1985, 457-478).

However, even their critical presentations cannot escape the rational framework constructed by themselves. Any 'new model of motivation' is not really new in a paradigmatic sense. The basic assumption of motivation studies is still there the individual maximizes rationally his personal utility. In addition, most of the theories have been partial theories of partial man (i.e. economic, social, political, psychological man) (Maccoby 1988). And as far as Maslow's need hierarchy is concerned, widespread criticism of it and especially its abuse

in organizations is produced by researchers. In spite of this it seems that we cannot even see the vicious circle, which is inside of it. In addition, many people seem to believe that satisfaction is reflected in increased work effort. Criticism of this a highly tenuous assumption could be found in a lot of studies (see Gibson-Teasey 1973; 93; Locke 1976: 1297-1345; Kaplan-Taussky 1977; Alvesson 1987:87-89, Carr-Pihlanto 1996). Practically these studies have produced a lot of facts, but not so much evidence. And alone this reason the search for the single, overarching motivation theory which will explain all of organizational behavior should have been abandoned (cf. Turner 1992, 47).

These beliefs should be maintained because they feed an obsessive hunger of rationalization in organization, and because they maintain the myths of endless productivity and efficiency. The motivation studies are in a way involved in the modern project, which is still going on in a frame of globalization. In 90's the organization as a type of rational model placed its emphasis on efficiency, but it does so by disregarding the issue of human meaning (Denhart 1981, 26-27). The 'maslowian' theory has become an institution, which we are confronted with within the framework of rational organization.

Need-hierarchy symbolizes climbing up the organizational ladder. Studies of need hierarchy have shown that self-actualization will increase at the top of the organizational hierarchy (Alvesson 1982). In practice, we know that the freedom of the superior is the same kind of myth as hierarchy is (Smircich 1982). It does not give any freedom to leader, although he has possibility take liberties at work time. He is, however, the subordinate in the organization - over eight hours in a day. The rational organization needs this myth because the function of organizational career dynamics depends on it as well does the myth of hierarchy. Even humanistic organization theorists seems to manipulate (e.g.) Maslow's concept of self-actualization in way that "want what the organization wants you to want, and then you may do what you want" as Schwartz (1990,21) is rightly noted. These theorists have rationalized, and instrumentalized basic concepts of life for the utilization in the organization.

Thus it can be argued that the myths produced by motivation theories will cause serious problems in the organization. By using these concepts of motivation man creates artificial reality and harmful misunderstandings of human life in organizations.

They have created only monistic approaches to human existence (Herzberg 1995, Morin 1995, Carr-Pihlanto 1996, 19). Through these concepts individuals alienate themselves from the fundamental questions of meaning. In other words, by using these concepts the individual begins to suppress experiences that do not fit the framework of these concepts. Here begins the process in which the individual tries to become somebody other than he is. That 'somebody' (or profession) is created by the institutions. In this way he seeks to legitimize his action, that he carries out in the work role or profession. If we little bring this to a head, he is at the mercy of the organization, but by doing so he is losing his own personality and his identity at the same time. He thinks that he is only valuable as a human being if he is what the organization wants him to be. Is it so that there will be no individual meaning, because a man relies on such artificial concepts produced by organization as motivation?

#### **AT CRITICAL STAGE DEEPER: MOTIVATION AS A PRODUCT OF ORGANIZATIONAL SCIENCE AND SURROGATE FOR TRANSFORMATIONS OF MEANINGS.**

In most motivation studies such concepts as culture, satisfaction at different stages of the life cycle and related especially midlife crisis have been passed with few words - avoiding large issues (see Kets de Vries-Miller 1984, 116-117). After having analyzed articles (N=422) of Journal of Applied Psychology (1960-1980). There are a found a lot of evidence about how much impact the organization context and culture could have on motivation, but hardly any of the articles tried to point out what this relation between culture and motivation might be (see e.g. Whitehall 1964; Rhinehart et al. 1969;). Culture was only taken as a given concept (e.g. nationality).

Locke (1976, 1309) has said that in relation to Maslow need hierarchy theory there is little firm support for its major thesis of a fixed hierarchy of needs which automatically governs action. He adds that not necessarily needs but values that dominate ones action the most. In the summary of the same article he says that motivation researchers have relied too heavily, on correlation studies and could benefit more from case and in-depth interview studies. There are a lot of researchers who have

presented the same kind of criticism. The criticism has pointed out that studies have neglected such aspects as a) individual history, b) age c) sosiobiografical differences, d) organizational culture, e) misapplication of Maslow theory, f) the hedonistic - individualistic fundamentals of the motivation concept and g) interpersonal form of motivation (see e.g. Gibson-Teasley 1973; Miner-Dachler 1973; Blacker-Brown 1978; Alvesson 1982; 1987 Kaplan-Tausky 1977; Schwartz 1983; Leather 1983; Kets de Vries-Miller 1984; Sievers 1986; Shamir 1991; Carr-Pihlanto 1996; Herzberg 1996)

In addition, it is extraordinary that Maslow (1965, 55-56) himself has criticized application of his theory concerning McGregor's X-and Y-theory as follows: "My work on motivations came from the clinic, from a study of neurotic people ...I am quite willing to concede this...because I'm a little worried about this stuff which I consider tentative being swallowed whole by all sorts of enthusiastic people."

On the other hand the Z-theory of organization, which Maslow developed based on McGregor's theory has been totally ignored in organization theory. The reason may be as simple as the fact that the Z-theory emphasizes the importance of feelings and 'irrational' side of human beings, which do not fit the machine view of organization (cf. Bowles 1990, 396, Damasio 1994). When Maslow talks about 'peak-experiences' he uses terminology, which cannot be comprehended in instrumental terms of organization at all. As Dahl-Lindblom (1953, 252) wrote already in 50s:

"Joy, love, friendship, pity, affection must all be curbed - unless they happen to foster the prescribed goals of organization."

This should be always discussed in the light of administrative concepts as efficiency and productivity. Efficiency and productivity are the latent metaphors, which are alone adequate arguments for every action in the organization. In the organization efficiency does not need any explanation, but joy and love need it desperately in the same way as all other 'irrational' elements need it.

What about the concepts of organization in this paper? It is hard to choose which is 'the best' view concerning meaning. However, I approach organizational culture from the 'has' view, because it seems to me that both motivation and meaning

have been produced by organization in order to maintain its function. At the same time I would like to see it as a group of individuals, who forget that organizational life as they live it, has been produced by themselves (see Wunthow et al. 1984, 25). In other words, there are transformations of meanings all the time, which cannot be used to maintain organization, but which are necessary for its existence. By accepting these ideas we can also assume that a group of individuals will become prisoners of their own habits and institutions, which lead them to the loss of meaning both an individual and an organizational level. As we know, this might cause disasters, unethical decisions or at least decline of success (Morgan 1986, 99-203; Schwartz 1987; Diamond 1988). But it is hard to totally agree with this 'pathological tendency' which seems to find its culmination among psychoanalytical organization theorists. It seems that this view will not open a very profitable discussion of interrelationship between the individual, work and organizational culture. If we believe that the organization has a transformation of meanings and a dynamic character, individuals are seldom as susceptible to manipulation and control as many psychoanalytical authors would have us believe (cf. Christensen 1989, 50-51). Developing this idea means that through the illusion of manipulation people may begin to produce the myth of manipulation in organization as well. They do not see another way of thinking than what is provided by e.g. the framework of motivation.

Therefore this article focuses more on the dynamics of meaning. There is not necessary such a basic conflict between the individual and the organizations as psychoanalytical researches have argued through the ages (see Argyris 1957, 1964, Diamond 1985, 1987; Hummel 1987). But there is tendency that the motivation theories, which are rarely understood in interpersonal terms, strengthen the position of this illusion in organizational theories. If we add to this imagination the motivation as a narrow defined action of an individual with its instrumental character, it seems even more reasonable to understand that some people think that the individual is here and the organization is 'out-there'. At the organizational level this could be described as dichotomy: we are our environment or our environment is 'out-there'. The danger of this illusion will be that the concept of meaning has tried to rationalize it in same way as motivation has rationalized it.

What could the alternative concepts be then? Sievers (1986, 338) writes in his essay that "motivation only became an issue...when meaning either disappeared or was lost from work". Alvesson (1987, 85) has the same opinion and suggests that instead of motivation we should talk about engagement or intentionally when we are describing the individuals' interest in taking action. I accept both of these aspects, but I would like to ask what are the alternatives for the future. It is easy to criticize the modern project, but how can we avoid this in our highly specialized world of organizations in which growth is self-evidently as adequate argument as productivity? The fragmentation of work is not a new invention as a source of lack of meaning. Berger (1964) wrote the reasons for a growing contemporary interest in examining the meaning of work. He says:

"The focus of the 'problem' is the question of 'meaning'. Now, social phenomena are always "meaningful", but in most cases these, meanings are taken for granted, organized in institutions ... That is, 'meaning' is not ordinarily a "problem" .It *becomes* problematic as the result of specific transformations within the society,...fragmentation of specific work processes, removing the worker further and further away from the product of his work." (Berger 1964, 213).

If we take up the phrase "meanings are taken for granted" we understand that the meaning which is self-evident to us is not a meaning any more, but it is as static a concept as motivation is. This problem I will return to later in this article. At this stage it should be noted that the question of meaning not only concerns work either. As we know, the meaning of work is also a cultural question, but it is also a very individual question. Elton Mayo said already in his first book that it must be possible for the individual to feel, as he works, that his work is socially necessary; he must be able to see beyond his own group in the society (Mayo 1919, 37). The concept of motivation is not able to provide the possibility for this feeling, but the concept of meaning in its widest sense may provide it. If this search of meaning is not the main point of organizational action, there will always be somebody who tries to provide meaning for the people, as Sievers (1986, 345) has noticed. In this sense meaning which has been taken for granted can be replaced by another. For us it has no more meaning - it is something dead.

The main point which I would like to stress in this article is that meaning as concept provides us with a wider perspective if we can avoid the traps that we face with their transformation into the self-evident element. Meaning alone as an integration "...of the private world and the public world, and lack of meaning as a separation of these worlds" (Weisskopf-Joelson 1968, 360), provides us with the possibility to go beyond the narrowly defined concept of motivation and the conflict between the individual and the organization. We must see beyond the fractioned person as he has run out of motivation and reconstitute in him in the wholeness of his meaning related to organizational meaning as a whole. For example the motivation studies of healthcare professionals may repeat the same conclusions for years, because the studies do not have institutional and cultural variables enough (cf. Lindström 1992, Kivimäki & Elovainio 1995).

This search process of applicable measures demands from us to learn to control our view of the organization, work, etc. in order to distinguish myth from reality. Thus, it is true that change must begin with one individual as Sievers (1986, 347) says according to Jung. But it is hard to believe that this change could happen by the actions of an individual on his own. We would rather say that the meaning of their importance should at first become a descriptive concept which begins to guide our behavior in one way or another, but still not becoming normative and self-evident. This sounds absurd, but in order to clarify this I approach these questions of motivation and meaning related to such concepts as life and death, static and dynamic. Why? Because the organizations are not in my view static, but dynamic. The ever-changing meanings of life are created and transformed by all. We should also say they are transformed by all meanings, not only such simple concepts as motivation or at least shared meanings as sociologists self-evidently assume (cf. Christensen 1989, 55; Linstead-Grafton-Small 1992, 337-339). For me here is the trap that man once more misinterprets himself as "nothing but" a product of social environment.

## MOTIVATION SERVING AS A MEANS-ENDS ANALYSIS

"...All descriptive concepts once they are used to organize reality and guide behavior, became

normative." (Argyris 1973, 265) The concept of motivation does not make an exception in this sense. It seems to be taken for granted as a product of reality, although it is totally artificial concept. Definition, however, might give us another impression:

"From the common sense point of view, motivation refers on one hand to conscious intents, to such inner thoughts as, I wish I could play piano, I want to be a doctor, and I am trying hard to solve this problem...motivation has to do with the why of behavior, as contrasted with the how or do what behavior... (Mc Clelland 1990, 4).

The concept of motivation is itself a very dynamic concept as Mc Clelland describes. However as applied in organizations motivation has another meaning, that is totally part of the how and do what behavior. The underlying assumptions of this is that the motivation is only important in terms of organization and as an instrument to get people to stay in their roles and work harder. An organization is rarely interested in what somebody wants to be, it ignores these questions (Morin 1995). The oldest idea of motivation, and still the most prominent, is to find universal variables of effective behavior in order to increase productivity in the organization. However, we believe that this static idea of motivation will never reach the reality of individual behavior which is changing all the time, because of the dynamic character of organizations.

Thus, for us motivation is a sign of death, because it tries to halt the transformation of human experiences and meanings in organization. According to this view it is then reasonable to assume that when the question of motivation arises in the organization - the organization is already dying. The concept of motivation is so static that it reaches the experience of human life only at the surface. Nevertheless, it tries to arrest at least the suspicious individuals and make them deviants. When the individual does not find any reason to carry on because the idea of organization has gone. There is no meaning to grasp in the space of organizational reality. Therefore motivation begins to replace this lack of meaning. Solution to this problem could be the concept of meaning, because everything even death and destruction could be faced so long as it has meaning (Whitmont 1969, 82). Or as Nietzsche has said "He who knows a "why" for living, will surmount almost every "how".

(Frankl 1978, 102). In other words if the organization is slipping towards bankruptcy or its success is evidently changing and innovation is disappearing, the solution for these problems is meaning. In Finland, however, the decline of health care sector in 90's did not increase so much studies of meanings than job satisfaction and job stress.

The questions for meaning helps us understand ourselves in this situation and gives us a chance to turn over a new leaf in organizational life. However, the discussion about possibility that the organization could consist of people, who are completely aware of their work and situation has been avoided in organizational theory. This is because control has become a self-evident argument in the same way as efficiency and productivity have become. Thus it is absurd to create artificial substitutes for loss of meaning.

Nevertheless these motivation theories, which are not theories of human behavior in the light of this knowledge, can be applied in this kind of situation. They provide a paradise for the consultant, who makes e.g. a climate study for an organization. We believe that the ordinary consultant wants to safeguard his background, and does not tell the organization that the problem is not how to integrate the individual and the organization, but to find the answer to the question: "What are the transformations of meanings in this organization?"

Integrating the individual and the organization finds its culmination in these organizational climate studies. Without exception, organizational climate study involves always the question of job satisfaction. However, I find this question irrelevant. On the contrary it can be very harmful for the organization - especially when the consultant is an 'invited pretender' who continues on the path of meaningless. On the other hand we can assume that it does not matter what attitude the consultant chooses, because his main purpose in the organization is to be a scapegoat, when necessary (see Baum 1989, 154-195).

I would like continue the discussion about motivation, which by this definition is suppressing the living experience of individuals. In this sense there is one important matter concerning the concept of job satisfaction. Usually job satisfaction has been approached as a instrumental question of performance and individual satisfaction. In spite of this an individual desires recognition of another individual or organization. He does not necessarily

act in the terms of needs. On the contrary he may act in the terms of a communal limit (i.e. organizational culture). Secondly, being satisfied does not necessarily mean that we are confronted with a physical state of emptiness or fullness. It could be understood as getting up from the table to work, it announces itself in a gradual opening of a new horizon (Jager 1989, 146). In other words satisfaction creates a seeking process of a new forms of action, not necessary a physical state of fullness or plenitude. Therefore it does not make any sense to argue that job satisfaction increases action or performance in the same work role. Instead it is more reasonable to say that individuals try to find some other work to do in order to get a new feeling of satisfaction, because he has 'had enough' of the old work.

Thus, how could it be explained that the individual does not choose any other form of action in the organization as there is the intrinsic relationship between the satisfaction and the action under organizational culture? New forms of action cannot be realized because of this. Therefore too much of the same work creates a situation, which could be expressed by the German phrase "Ich bin das Leben satt". According to Jager (1989, 147) this might be translated as "I have enough of life, I have had it 'up to here' with living; I want to die". In an organizational context this could mean something like 'I have had enough of this work. I want to 'die' instead of doing it.

These themes have almost always been ignored in the studies of job satisfaction. In a way Leathers (1983, 110) describes this problem :

'.. The concept of motivation in behavioral science is handled as a manipulative technique in terms of which those outcomes which people (or laboratory animals) are thought to want are made dependent upon their performing some required behavior. The motivated actor is viewed as someone who is able to maximize (or at least "satisfice") his outcomes through a process of "rational" choice.'

Thus motivation is born implicitly following the ideal of the machine metaphor in the organization. Job satisfaction as well as motivation try to differentiate ways in which to limit appearance of free will. These concepts try to convince us that actions out of selected roles are not actions at all, because they do not serve the idea of the rational

organization. By doing this at the same time they suppress all those experiences and actions, which are full of meanings. They try to deny that meaning may differ from man to man, from day to day, and from the situation to situation. Basically, for example health care professionals have high intrinsic motivation if they have time to work with people, help them and see their effectiveness of care and cure (cf. Kivimäki-Lindström 1994, 23). Consequently, this is a fundamental meaning attached to caring which do not change from day to day like opinions do. The concept of motivation, which do not give people opportunity to experience this meaning, is full of conceptualized and at the same time idealized meaning. Conceptualized in terms of rational heritage of science. Interestingly the social school of thought does not differ here at all. (cf. Lindstead-Grafton-Small 1992, 334) In other words, nurses and doctors are expected to motivate themselves in another way, which somehow covers up the basic reality of their work in hospitals (eg. the meaning of work is destroyed by the cut-back management).

It has been argued that the motivation of employees is the predominant problem in organizations. It may be a dominant myth of organization theory, because its meaning is ontologically static. Motivation is not human action at all, but it tends to naturalize action in organization (Rentsch 1990). This assumption carries serious connotation in research concerning both culture and action. It seems that they place too much emphasis on the description: what is good for the organization is good for man (Fromm 1973). However, the main point is not this, but control as a underlying belief in organization. Paradoxically this motivation 'discussion' has strengthened the illusion of manipulation, which does not exist to the extent as we usually believe. And for this reason we have begin to obey our illusion of control and manipulation and this has lead us far away from the main issues of organizational life: its transformations of meanings.

## MEANING AS A SIGN OF LIFE

If a superior asks his subordinates: "Why do you work?", the answer might be: "In order to find a meaning and a purpose in life". However this answer does not need to be necessarily the answer to meaning. When the question is understood in

its broader sense i.e. "Why do you work at all?" Why don't you simply give up?" the answer definitely springs from the area of meaning as Sargent (1973, 121) argues. By asking this from everybody, the superior or leader can usually obtain a multisided view of the situation. He can build a more holistic image of the group's understanding of itself, work and organization. This way searching for meaning from the workers' experiences is more fruitful than using motivation techniques (cf. Smircich-Morgan 1982). For us the main idea of this view is that meaning is taken as an instrument for the managing of the meanings of individuals, not necessary the individuals themselves. As we see, we cannot avoid the idea in which meaning is a tool for something.

What is meant then by meaning? The concept of meaning is not so easy that it could be defined properly in this short article. However I will try to do it briefly. First of all it could be said that meaning is indeterminism - full of dynamism. Everybody has the free will to give different meanings to different things. There is nobody who can say that this is the only meaning of this or that thing. Therefore, when we are talking about meaning we should remember that man always lies behind the organization. His problems are not organizational problems or at least rational or possible to express by words. In spite of this fact, organizational psychology as a behavioral science has discovered the problem of motivation. It maintains the myth of rational behavior at the expense of individual transformations of meaning in work and life. As many researchers have said, theories of motivation are mostly based on the Freudian idea that man's primary motivation is will to pleasure or Adler's will to power. According to Frankl (1978) man is principally motivated by a "will to meaning". There should be different purposes in life, not only hedonistic i.e. material. Nevertheless, for example work meaning varies from individual to individual and situation to situation, work must make sense to an individual before he will perform it. This is the shared phenomenon among researches (see Sargent 1982; Berger 1964; Sievers 1986). Not even Maslow, who has been misunderstood, denied this. Maslow did not believe that e.g. self-actualization or other needs could be the culmination of the human being. On the contrary he said:

"The only happy people I know are the ones

who are working well at something they consider important ...I agree entirely with Frankl that man's primary concern is his will to meaning ...Hunting peak-experiences directly doesn't work. Generally they happen to a person. We are ordinarily "surprised by joy" (Maslow 1965,6; 1966, 118-110)

Denne and Thompson (1991) discuss three main definitions of meaning by Berger-Luckmann, M. Heidegger and V. Frankl. Meaning is socially constructed and internalized through childhood socialization, as Berger-Luckmann (1966) has described. These authors direct the individual to seek and commit the self to alternate construction of reality. Secondly Heidegger approaches this question as a framework of creation. The creation of meaning is integral to the human orientation toward the future, and satisfying meaning is created by structuring existence around fulfilling realistic and uniquely individual possibilities. In order to achieve this individuals must first acknowledge and experience the suppression of finality which previously led them to live automatically and inauthentically according to the forms, routes, and opinions of the masses (cf. organization culture). In addition they must accept the limitation of finality and any other uniquely personal limitations, and continue to take responsibility for living towards unique personal possibilities which precede death. Thus Heidegger stresses authenticity and individuality more than the social creation of meanings. Thirdly, according to Frankl (1978) the role of human thought is not to create but to discover true meanings. Meaning is to be found in creative action directed toward the world, in receptive experience of the world, and in attitudes about unchangeable circumstances which give meaning even to suffering. According to Frankl (1983, 102) there are three areas in which man's meanings can be actualized: a) creative (e.g. individuals contributions to society), b) experiential (e.g. playing piano) and c) attitudinal (e.g. understanding pain, suffering and death). It should be emphasized that you can experience meaning through one value or different values. The former could be labeled as a pyramid model of meaning, and the latter as a parallel model of meaning (see Lukas 1980:13-44). Frankl's ideas have not applied very much to organizational studies, but on the other hand there are not so much the empirical studies of meaning based on different theories, either. As Rentsch (1990, 669) has noticed:



"although the study of meaning in organizations is an essential characteristic of culture research, few theorists have carefully defined it."

The above theories have a common view in which individuals' behavior is based on their interpretations of or the meaning they attach to situations. The difference is that Berger-Luckman approaches these situations as a social question whereas Heidegger and Frankl approach them in the framework of the individual. Frankl stresses individual's responsibility to discover and live according to the true meanings of their unique existence and situations. The only way to reach this in every situation is the ability to self-transcendence (i.e. to be directed to something other than oneself) (Frankl 1966, 21-23; Denne-Thompson 1991, 111). In addition, one interesting definition has been made by Weisskopf-Joelson (1968, 360). Meaning could be divided into three groups: 1) ..that of the private world and the public world, and the lack of meaning as separation of these two worlds, 2) as an explanation or an interpretation of life, i.e. overall "meaning of life". 3) as a purpose or task in life as Frankl emphasizes it. (see also Sargent 1973, 11-12)

However, the question of meaning is not as simple as these definitions are. In the frame of the individual no research provides first-hand empirical descriptions according to Denne-Thompson (1991, 113). For this reason I find it very difficult to understand why it has been taken for granted in applied organizations. It is hard to see any reason why we should believe that the concept of meaning would be socially constructed. In a postmodern world our experiences as individuals do not reach such a level of harmony any more (Weick 1995). In the same way it is hard to believe that meaning could only be defined based on Heidegger or Frankl's ideas. For us individual meanings arise from events and relationships which a person interprets within his most basic frame of reference. Especially his awareness of being an individual and also social activity at the level of language and communication. We can argue that there are no individual meanings, but before doing this we should remember that self-analysis makes individual meaning possible. Thus meaning should stem from ways of living in the expressive orders of organization, contributions to a life form, in which each of us tries to demonstrate our worth and individual value. How is this possible? We can not

give answers, because as far as we know this more than any other question, which should be studied empirically. As a language question it may be fruitful to approach it the context of where every word is taken as an act. Nevertheless, the above remarked theories give us the idea that we can a) achieve, b) create, c) feel, d) find and e) search the meaning in the organization and in our life. But if we want to avoid make meaning as a static concept as motivation is, we should not try to provide it as a form of any matter. In other words, it is possible that motivation studies cannot grasp profoundly the process of meaning: a nurse can achieve meaning for her work, if she creates a rewarding relationship between patient, feels that interactive meaning as experience and search meaning and purpose for herself from this process. (cf. Elovainio et al 1996).

We should be open to all different definitions of meaning if we are to avoid a becoming prisoners of our own point of view. I have already referred to Berger the following sense: the "problem" is not "meaning", but the fact that it has become the a matter of course. If we relate this to the concept of organizational culture we have to accept the idea that organization 'has' culture rather than it 'is' culture. Sievers said (1986, 338) that "...motivation only became an issue ... when meaning either disappeared or was lost from work. In the light of the organizational culture "disappeared" is analogical to the "is" view, and "lost" is analogical to the "has" view. If meaning is something that can be lost it is reasonable to assume it to be then something that can be provided to people as well. If the organization "has" meaning which is "last" there should be culture also in the "has" sense, whereas "disappeared" implicates that transformation of meanings is happening so fast that the individual cannot find or reach it. An example of transformation would be the merging of one company to another.

From the "has" view Peters and Waterman gave us an example of how meaning can also be used as an instrument of manipulation. They described companies, which have taken the form of a God, and they expected the employees to worship the companies. They create different rites and ceremonies in order to commit the members to the organization totally. There is no reason to deny the importance of this kind of encouragement to work, but the consequences which will follow it can be destructive (i.e. bankruptcy). Peters and Waterman (1981, 56) write:

"We desperately need meaning in our lives and will sacrifice a great deal to institutions that will provide meaning for us."

Undoubtedly this is true to some extent - especially if we accept that meaning can be provided, not find or create (cf. Sievers 1986, 345; Denne-Thompson 1991, 109-133). But this question still remains: do we have to do it at the expense of other meanings? The idea of providing meaning to the organization's members is the same as providing religion to members. The markets and the environment do not need to involve themselves in religion, and there will be a time when members of an organization, blinded by the provided meaning, cannot see that the customers of the organization are of another religion. This proves that meaning has become as much a static concept as motivation is. It has begun to live its own life and forgotten the surrounding transformation of environment and its meanings. The question of organization as a Church has also interested other researchers (see Bowles 1989).

What are the reasons providing meaning for members of the organization? First by providing a single meaning simplifies the organizational reality leads to developing the same kind of concept as motivation sooner or later. It does not stem from the experiences of the individual or the transformation of meanings. It is true that this process creates so called strong culture and its dominant meaning. Individuals have typically in this situation accepted more of the outer world than is necessary and permit themselves to become dominated by meaning, which we may not find intrinsically persuasive, but which we accept simply in order to 'get along' as Denhart (1981, 3) has pointed out.

### **SOME EXAMPLES OF THE IMPORTANCE OF MEANING IN HEALTH CARE ORGANIZATIONS**

The meaning provided by the organization can lead us a situation where we cannot distinguish true meanings from false. As we know rational organization is not usually concerned with this question, because it approaches individuals as tools (Denhardt 1981, 43). Which one is important for health care organizations: to take care of patients or develop technology that does it on the

behalf of personnel? In our time the answers is obvious: rationalism manifests itself more easily inventions of technology than inventions of human relationships.

The ideas of Peters and Waterman do not make any exception in this sense. The concept of meaning has been used in the same sense as motivation has been used through the ages. Even the title of the chapter in their book "Man waiting for motivation" tells us how the deterministic view describes taking individual action and the ability to create meanings.

Here is the reason for taking a look at the pyramid and parallel models of meanings. It is reasonable to assume that if we only accept provided meaning as an implication of shared religion, the meaning will take the form of a pyramid. As Soeters (1986) has stated the excellent companies mobilize their human resources in the same way as religious sects. In this view it seems that these companies provided the meaning for their members as social movements seems to do - the static meaning so to speak. For example the work was presented in the framework of a mission, which gives you a sense of elation - you are somebody only if you are the same as you mission is (Peters -Waterman 1981, 323). As we know every one dimensional mission will die some day, because it does not take into account the individual's experiences in which new meanings come into existence all the time, and because everything depends solely on meaning, which is at top of the pyramid, ignoring others which are subordinates to it. The consequences will be disastrous because meaning is no longer 'meaning' in a dynamic sense.

During the last decade the most models for healthcare reforms has been adopted from private sector and management (cf. management by results, TQM, QCs). In Finland nurses and physicians have answered a hundred of questionnaires about their coping with stress and mental strain at work. At least to some extent these studies could be criticized as seeking answers to the problems for example job stress, which cannot be solved by employees, employers at all. Inadequate answers are caused by the fact that the problems are produced by the predicaments of society and its culture. The predicaments are produced all the time by our beliefs, which are against our well-being in our everyday life. There is no doubt that job stress and work load are produced by the highlighted values in western

culture: to get things done in terms of economical efficiency even at the area of preventive health care (cf. child psychiatry). There are a quite a lot of evidence that the nurses who has established their own private nursing homes or other enterprises did that for two reasons: they lost their meaning of work, and turned to be afraid loose their jobs as well (Kovalainen-Simonen 1996). Against this evidence is it reasonable ask: why do we not have research about social and administrative structures and health policy implementation in a following way: does a current health care policy and managerial philosophies of hospitals lead to the experience of meaninglessness among nurses and physicians? The answer to all problems seems to be too often extrinsic rewards, especially pay rise. However, raises in wage do not reduce job demands, quantitative work overload, troublesome patients and lack of control etc. (Elovainio et al. 1996, 522). In addition, financial rewards do not solve the problem of meaning by and large.

On the other hand, adopting the models of motivation and incentives from private sector may not work at all, because they do not meet genuine predicaments of healthcare organizations. In addition, the interpersonal relations are shaped by subcultures of healthcare so much that a new fad (cf. teamwork) will not solve all their problems. For example the active nurses have found to consider their mental well-being better than passive ones (Miettinen 1996). Therefore the more important issue than motivation may be a hospitals' structural and cultural barrier of the experience of meaningfulness in a frame of activity. This may even be the cultural predicament of hospitals in a global settings. Following this idea, we should find answer to question: how nurses and physicians are expected to be motivated if they have lost meaning at work? Job satisfaction and climate studies will quite often give results, which are good enough for excuse to avoid the profound changes at the cultural and structural level of hospitals. In other words, the results of climate studies can be interpreted always in a way that the head of hospital (cf. Lloyd et al 1999) can avoid a constructive change in relationships between different professional groups. Incompetent hospital managers can always go behind the results: in average people are satisfied enough - any deep reforms are not needed.

Rather than motivating employees, leaders should encourage their employees to ask

questions: why do I work? What do I want from my work life? 'What are main sources of my well-being in these organizations? By gathering this information together leaders are able to apply the appropriate managerial knowledge in his organization, clinic or ward. For years the studies of motivation and job satisfaction in health care organizations has ended up the same conclusion: negative and positive feedback do not exist enough (Vuori 1993). Rather than the problem this is the predicament of the values embedded in health care organizations. In a loosely-coupled organizational systems, which hospitals typically are, the flow of information has been always problem (Weick 1979). Therefore, rather than studying nurses' and physicians' job stress, it would be wiser to study the meanings of behavior related to the basic values in hospitals: "good work is taken for granted and little praise given" (Menzies 1960, 113). The studies like this may produce knowledge, which may be related to the fragmented paradigms of medicine and nursing science, which are not able to confront each other in any minutes of meetings (cf. surgery against psychiatry).

In order to avoid the experience of meaninglessness, healthcare leaders (chief executives, hospital managers, chief executive physicians, chief physicians, head nurses etc.) should probably consider to be more careful in considering different meanings which crop up from individual experiences (cf. Smircich-Morgan 1982).

Meaning should not be like a pyramid, neither at an individual nor at an organizational level. It is hard to say whether it should be a parallel form either. It sounds reasonable, because if some meanings disappear there are always some other meanings to grasp. Diversified organizations are a good example of this at the production level. At an individual level Frankl's logotherapy describes how an individual can maintain a meaning in life through the parallel system of values. In spite of these arguments, meanings are changed again into a static instrument in order to maintain a meaningful in organization. Does it in fact happen at the expense of all other meanings which are transformed by living experiences of nurses and physicians all the time? Unfortunately in this paper I can not go a stage deeper in to this question.

I admit that in some cases different ideological conflicts can be solved by myths, even by myths of provided meaning. Scheid-Cook (1988) found that mediaotary myths held by mental health

organizations participants provide cognitive bridges between contradictory elements of an organization's ideology. Mental health professionals have to believe that psychotropic medication provides an effective cure. These kind of myths are essential to the process of creating meaningful relief systems as Pondy (1983) points out. And again if we choose this view we are very near the self-evident stage of meaning (i.e. the static). By sharing this meaning learning from experience will be more difficult, because experts do not criticize each other. In other words the medication may be highlighted too much especially if the health care policy makers CEOs and hospital managers value the economical efficiency of psychiatry at the expense of a long-term therapy.

Meaning seems also to be very a important question in a frame of public image of health care professionals. In 1989 the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health published a questionnaire survey of young physicians licensed in Finland during the period 1977-86 (n=5208) (Kataja 1989). The most interesting findings were that most of the physicians in primary health care organizations value their work (i.e. meaning), but they felt that they did not get enough recognition from the public, patients and other workers (cf. Hyppölä 2000). This lack of recognition deeply affected their experience of work. Sihvonen (1990) analyzed dimensions of motivation quantitatively in four health centers. However the main conclusions were qualitative: besides the need to rebuild the feeling of work being meaningful, it is important for the superiors in the health centers to concentrate on the management of meaning in order to increase the understanding of work as a part of the entity. According to Sihvonen (1990, 131) there is an enormous lack of meaning in work, autonomous thinking and management of meaning in health centers. Rather than rising the wages of the physicians we should answer the question: does it make sense to get paid in healthcare centers?

The leaders of health centers should concentrate on the leadership of meaning in order to increase the meaning of work. Here, it should be noted that these studies were not cultural or qualitative. This brings to our mind the question: "What would had been the results, if the studies of meaning had been based on these conclusions? Same studies give us a hint of what kind of answers there could be. Kinnunen (1990, 126) concluded in his organizational culture study of primary health care

organization (cognitive approach) that the division of work was a ritualistic tension. There were a lot of habits, which have been separated from their original meaning. Kinnunen et al (1991, 58) concluded that the basic functional problem of hospital is the "myth of goodness". People are unable to create close relations with their colleagues because they fear to be what they are. They maintain the myth at the expense of their own meanings which arise from their most basic frame of reference - awareness of being an individual and having personal biography.

In addition, in a cultural sense there are a lot of myths about the differences in individual motivation between private and public organizations (cf. Steel-Wamer 1990). Almost always it is taken for granted that private physicians are better than the public ones, although they have the same education. This institutionalized product functions as powerful myth and conflicts sharply with public physicians transformations of meanings. The myth will be not buried, because it is widely supported by public opinion and because public physicians merely forgets that the public opinion has been supported by themselves, too.

The point is that the individual will loose his creative relation to the organizational culture, because his organizational role has become a total surrogate for his identity (cf. Miettinen 1996). In this state of mind he is no longer able to apply his true inner life to the organizational culture and the life of transformation of meanings. A chief physician may be leader in a technical sense, not incorporated sense. When alienated from his true self he will not allow himself to express his true self. One day he will not be able to understand what his meaning in life is, and that his ideas could be worthy in the organizational culture. This is a serious problem of modern organizations, especially in health care.

## CONCLUSIONS

In Figure 1. I have sketched out the level where the empirical studies of meaning might be done (quadrant II) and where they have mainly been done (quadrant III). I am aware of the risks concerning the use of this kind of categorization, but in spite of this I believe that figure 1. is more useful than harmful in order to obtain better knowledge about the meaning in the context of

organizations. There have of course, been studies done in quadrant IV (e.g. Hofstede 1984), but as long as these studies are the variables, which categorize experiences and their meanings; they do not differ remarkably from the studies in quadrant III. Quadrant I could be also useful for future studies. However, the main problem of it is that the old concepts of administration can be so attached to their latent metaphors that they do not impinge on the transformation of meanings at any level.

Quadrant III nurses and physicians has been approached as objective actors of motivation. In survey studies the important aspects and variables are determined by the researcher in a way that marginal answers, which do not fit the world picture of the researcher will be ignored quite easily as "not interesting results". This may lead into the vicious circle conclusions: the amount positive and negative feedback should be increased in order to motivate nurses, because the variables of survey do not focus on the core of the motivational predicaments. In other words, nurses and physicians may answer to the questions at the level of opinions, not meanings constructed by their experiences of life in these organizations. But do not be misled: studies in Quadrant III should be done in the future as well, because it gives us a general view of satisfaction in organizations. However, the research should be more balance with quadrant II. Otherwise, researchers may find it difficult to formulate theoretically adequate models for motivation in healthcare. As Locke (1996, 90) describes, for example pediatric oncology may, at times, be horrifying work, but organizations members need to accept this passively. This "affective neutrality" creates culture in which the meaning attached to work cannot be measured with general job satisfaction scales.

Quadrant II differs from the harmful connotations in the other quadrants and it is for that reason recommendable for empirical studies of meaning. In this quadrant physicians and nurses are the subjective actors, who define themselves meaningful action even for health policy makers. They attach meanings to their work on the basis of their personal history. This facilitates at least Finnish researchers understand why job satisfaction was important issue already in 70's even if the economy of hospitals were going much better than in 90's. On the other hand the experience of meaning is related to job stress among nurses.

According to Elovainio et al (1996, 522) low levels of goal clarity - that is, poor knowledge of causes, origins, and pathways of stress - would cause higher levels of strain due to accompanying feelings of uncertainty. From sociological and existentialistic point of view, the feelings of uncertainty has been always related to the experience of meaning (Seeman 1959, Maddi 1970).

Presumably, the meaning approach may reveal the basic forms of cultural meanings in healthcare. Physicians and nurses may have meaning perspectives, which may be distorted, because of their cognitive structures strongly pertain to medicine and nursing science (cf. Mezirow 1991, Hyyppölä 2000, 62). Therefore, the challenge for healthcare leaders is obvious one: who are these physicians and nurses who are able to lead on the basis of administrative knowledge, not on the basis of medicine or nursing science? This question is for the future, because head nurses and chief physicians will be more a local health policy makers and they have to have knowledge beyond their own medical and nursing expertise. Against this vision the study of meanings related to health promotion cannot ignored either. Health care leaders may have to be more interested in the transformative meanings of physicians and nurses in order find out why health policy implementation does not manifest itself in health care practices at all (Saltman-Figueras 1997).

Finally, we can always be skeptical about related to these quadrants. They try to collect experiences in the framework of history, and not describe them here and now. In spite of these shortcomings we should not neglect the importance of e.g. symbolic manifestations of meaning, though the making sense of them is rather more difficult (cf. Turner 1992, 63) If there is any space left for normative statements I would like to make one: the transformation of meaning should be studied empirically especially in health care organizations in a way that the institutional and cultural changes are included in variables.

In figure 1. I have a tentative theory for health care organizations. Figure I. is suggested to read in way that in the future psychoanalytic, psychological, sociological, and managerial knowledge relate to overall satisfaction at different stages of the life cycle should be studied and combined from the meaning perspective point of view. Basically, it means that we have to find answers to even questions like: is it possible that



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