MEANINGFUL WORK, EMPLOYEESHIP AND WELL-BEING

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Recent publications:
OUTLINE

• Introduction
• Evolution
• Meaningful activity and well-being
• Human dignity and self-respect
• Employeeship in focus NOT Leadership
• Workplace dignity and conditions – Responsible Leadership
• Implications - Employees Stakeholder Management (ESM) NOT HRM!
• Conclusions
INTRODUCTION

• Increasing interest and research into understanding meaningfulness of work through various theoretical concepts over the last two decades (Bowie, 1998; Michaelson, 2008; Lips-Wiersma and Morris, 2009); meaningful work is equally important like pay and security or even more (Pratt and Ashforth, 2003: 309)

• However, there is still ambiguity of what is the meaning of meaningful work along with the implications for management in terms of organizational culture, structure and leadership

• Two main traditions: 1. management and organizations studies (includes leadership, organizational culture, recently employee engagement) and 2. humanistic paradigm (‘fragmented to explain the holistic experience of meaningful work’ Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009: 495)
OBJEKTIVE

I attempt to clarify the meaning of meaningful work and how it is linked to employee’s well-being and thereby suggests some managerial implications for responsible leadership, organizational culture and meaningful employee engagement and to emphasize the importance of employees’ dignity at workplace.
KINDS AND VALUES OF WORK

- Market based work and wages: manual and knowledge based
- Non wages work: domestic care and charity
- Value of work can be traced from Marxism to today’s capitalism
- Certain kinds of work have become commodity – low margin and repetitive and are being replaced by robots – human essence is cut out!

- However, there are many other kinds work that are being performed by human beings but without much regard to their well-being – in many dimensions – emotional, intellectual, physical and spiritual
PROBLEMS WITH MEANING OF WORK

• In market based wages, meaning of work is heavily emphasized on economic value creation in terms of productivity neglecting social value creation in terms of affective, cognitive and attitudinal aspects.

• Furthermore, meaning of work is marred by political and social factors; for example, treating employees with stereotypical distinctions of culture, gender etc.

• Employees are ‘motivated for all wrong reasons’- money, self-esteem, social acceptance, and escape from home...’ (Michaelson, 2007)
VARIOUS ASSOCIATIONS OF MEANINGFUL WORK

• **Meaningful work with individual self-esteem** (Nozick, 1974)
  - The issue here is self-esteem (a psychological concept) versus self-respect

• **Meaningful work is primary concerned with working conditions for the powerless** (Schwartz, 1982; Arneson, 1987; Bowie, 1998)
  - The issue here is that it is not clear how normative context of well-being

• **Kantian concept of meaningful work** (Bowie, 1998)
  - This has some merits and I will derive self-respect from Kantian works

• **The engagement of the human spirit at work** (May et al. 2004)
  - Reveals meaningfulness have the strongest effect on engagement (with a significant role of psychological safety)

• **Just and dignified work** (Hodson, 2001; Lamont, 2002; Murihead, 2004)
  - Human dignity and just conditions are important
EVOLUTION OF HRM

• HRM as a discipline and practice has been evolving away from treating employees as resources to treating employees through some concepts such as employee satisfaction, employee empowerment and employee engagement

• Employee engagement has recently become a significant topic both within human resources management consultancy and academic research (May et al., 2004; Saks, 2006; Macey and Schneider, 2008)

• However, there are many different meanings associated with employee engagement and a variety of factors have been identified and proposed for employee engagement
MEANINGFUL WORK AND ACTIVITY

- These factors contributing to employee engagement may contribute to meaningfulness of work; however, ‘meaning of the employee engagement concept is unclear’ (Macey & Schneider, 2008)

- Although employee engagement may be construed to comprise a) psychological sate engagement, b) behavioural engagement and c) traits engagement (Macey & Schneider, 2008), it is not clear how it links to meaningful activities

- Meaning has to be given by the employee and it cannot be ascribed by the management (cf. Frankl, 1959)

- Moreover, it is important to link meaningful activity to well-being
ON WELL-BEING

• It is not to develop a theory of well-being but rather to understand the normative context of well-being (Nathan, 2010)

• Well-being cannot be reduced to one master value (Parfit, 1984; Dworkin, 2000 & Scanlon, 2000)

• Our worldview shapes our ethical convictions of good or meaningful life

• Our worldview is gradually formed through interaction of ideas of ‘good’ life (idealism) and our lived experience (realism) (Nathan, 2010, based on Dilthey)

• One has to genuinely endorse one’s ethical convictions and activities are meaningful when they are in accord with their ethical convictions (Nathan, 2010);

• Therefore, our context gains normative significance
NORMATIVE CONTEXT AND JUSTICE

• What should be our normative context for us to engage and carry out our activities in accord with our convictions?

  ➢ **Right circumstances of justice** (see Dworkin, 2000) for not only one to genuinely endorse one’s convictions, but also to pursue one’s meaningful activities accordingly facing ‘fair challenges’

  ➢ Therefore, as the firm is embedded within society and its activities cut across many spheres – social, political, ecological – the above question leads us to rethink the purpose and the social responsibility of the firm in meeting the right circumstances for all stakeholders to pursue their well-being (Nathan, 2016)
DIGNITY AT WORK PLACE

• What makes these people function well despite their repeated failures and setbacks?

• Rowland and Foxx (2003) suggest that people who have self-respect believe ‘that they are worth the effort it takes to consider their disappointments and failures as closely as their triumphs and successes’.

• The moral significance of self-respect, also known as ‘magnanimity’, ‘proper pride’ and a ‘sense of dignity’, has been discussed in moral philosophy by Aristotle, Augustine, Spinoza, Rousseau, Hume, Hegel, Nietzsche and many others.

• In short, one may define self-respect as ‘a sense of one’s own dignity’ or ‘a sense of personal dignity and worth’.

CONSTITUENTS OF SELF-RESPECT

Dering from Kant and Dilthey, a concept of self-respect, a self-respecting individual has the responsibility and moral duty to reflect on himself/herself as a moral being. The concept of self-respect should highlight autonomy, character and conduct as essential components (Nathan 2010).

- **Autonomy** entails taking responsibility for oneself and leading a meaningful life by facing one’s challenges in life.
- **Character** reflects a relational aspect of personality.
- **Conduct** is the manner in which a person carries out her meaningful activities through social participation.

THE UPSHOT OF SELF-RESPECT

The upshot of self-respect (which is constituted by autonomy, character and conduct) is that those who respect themselves will take responsibility seriously and will be considerate of others’ self-respect within the context of an interdependent web of social relationships.

Source: Nathan, 2010
ON SELF-ESTEEM

• Self-esteem is a ‘subjective measure’, an emotional response to self evaluation in terms of liking or feeling good about oneself; it depends on how one feels about one’s capacities, performance and perception of others’ opinions.

• People who engage in strategies such as ‘self-serving attributions’ to increase self-esteem can get into social difficulties when others realize that this tactic is being used (Roland and Foxx 2003: 265; cf. Forsyth et al. 1981).
SELF-RESPECT AS A MORAL FOUNDATION

• will enable:
  • taking responsibility for one’s failures without blaming others
  • giving due credit to others on their successes
  • failures to be taken not as a shame on oneself (lowering self-esteem) but as learning with self-confidence – no loss of self-confidence
  • mutual recognition (no need to demand for respect)
  • diversity to be embraced as a source of growth – (no need to develop us-against-them syndrome)
  • pursuing one’s interests whilst allowing others to pursue their interests – no blocking or burdening or arbitrary interference
  • not to take pride on what is given by birth or to be ashamed of
EMPLOYEESHIP

• Employeeship is basically self-leading rather being led (the focus of leadership) empowering employee responsibility (see Nathan, 2015: 117; cf: Lui and Irfaeya, 2004; Møller, 1994)

• Therefore, it is constituted by
  • Autonomy
  • Ownership and
  • Responsibility

• In traditional management practices, employees are expected to take responsibility without much regard to ownership and autonomy
EMPLOYEESHIP, DIGNITY AND WELL-BEING

• Employeeship can foster self-respect which is constituted by autonomy, character and conduct

• Employeeship would enable employees to engage in their meaningful activities according to their ethical convictions thereby contributes to their well-being

• However, it is to be noted that one may be mistaken with one’s ethical convictions, due to unfair challenges due to unjust conditions

• Therefore, it is important to provide just context
Employee engagement promotes the notion of ‘desirable condition’ with the idea of organizational purpose’ for attitudinal and behavioural components (Macey and Schneider, 2008: 4); however, it is not clear how these can be linked to autonomy, ownership and responsibility.

Macey and Schneider (2008: 6) provides a framework including autonomy and transformational leadership; however, I shall argue the importance responsible leadership to create just context.
JUST CONTEXT FOR EMPLOYEESHIP

• Autonomy
  • Requires no arbitrary interference by the management
  • Freedom as non-domination – no blocking or burdening of engaging in meaningful activities
  • Meaning ascribed by employees should not become a ‘form of normative control’ by the management (Lips-Wiersman & Morris; cf. Ashforth & Vaidyanath, 2002; Casey, 1999; Willmot, 1993)
  • Employees to be treated as stakeholders not as resources (Nathan, 2015)

• Ownership

• Responsibility
Employeeship is to be complemented with responsible leadership in the sense that to create just conditions to foster employeeship.

Based on the conditions for deliberation for justice (Nathan, 2014; also Nathan, 2010), the responsible leadership should provide the following conditions:

- **Freedom as non-domination**
- **Recognition** in three dimensions
  - **Acknowledgement** in their employees’ identities (multiple and intersecting)
  - **Authorization** of their view points (listening and fully heard)
  - **Endorsement** of the practices that shall not violate the above conditions
IMPLICATIONS TO ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

- Culture should enable employees to derive their meaning of meaningful work not to be ascribed by the management through employeeship
- It should foster self-respect and thereby employeeship
- Freedom as non-domination
  - The ability to resist and oppose (Ciulla, 1998; Lamont, 2002)
- Developing code of ethics and conduct to foster self-respect
- Human Resources Management should be renamed to foster human dignity at work place – Employee Stakeholder Management (see Nathan, 2015)
CONCLUSION

• Brought to attention of the link between self-respect and employeeship and meaningful activities to meaningful work and well-being

• Leadership without employeeship can lead to undermine employee’s dignity at work place

• Employeeship requires responsible leadership to create just conditions at work place and it is not about leading employees

• Organizational culture should foster employeeship and HRM should be termed as Employee Stakeholder Management (ESM)
MAIN REFERENCES


THANKS FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION

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