

# MEANINGFUL WORK, EMPLOYEESHIP AND WELL-BEING

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**Recent publications:**

Nathan, G. (2017, forthcoming). Design Thinking Approach to Ethical (Responsible) Technological Innovation, In: ***Responsible Research and Innovation: From Concepts to Practices***, (eds.) R. Gianni, J. Pearson and B. Reber, Routledge.

Nathan, G. (2016). Towards re-theorizing the firm in pursuit of well-being and social justice, in: ***Understanding Ethics and Responsibilities in a Globalizing World***, M.C. Coutinho de Arruda, B. Rok (eds.), The International Society of Business, Economics, and Ethics Book Series 5, Springer.

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# OUTLINE

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- **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

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- **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)

# OBJECTIVE

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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

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- **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

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- 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

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- **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

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- **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

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- **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 state 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

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- **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

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- **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

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- **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’**.

Source: Nathan, 2010; cf. Roland & Foxx, 2003; cf. Dillon, 1995

# CONSTITUENTS OF SELF-RESPECT

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Drawing 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.

Source: Nathan, 2010; cf. Sennett, 2003; cf. Roland & Foxx, 2003; cf. Dillon, 1995

# THE UPSHOT OF SELF-RESPECT

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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

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- 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

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- **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

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- **Employeehip 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

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- **Employeeeeship can foster self-respect** which is constituted by autonomy, character and conduct
- Employeeeeship 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**

# CONTEXT FOR EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

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- **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

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- **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**

# RESPONSIBLE LEADERSHIP

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- **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

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- **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

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- **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)**



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