

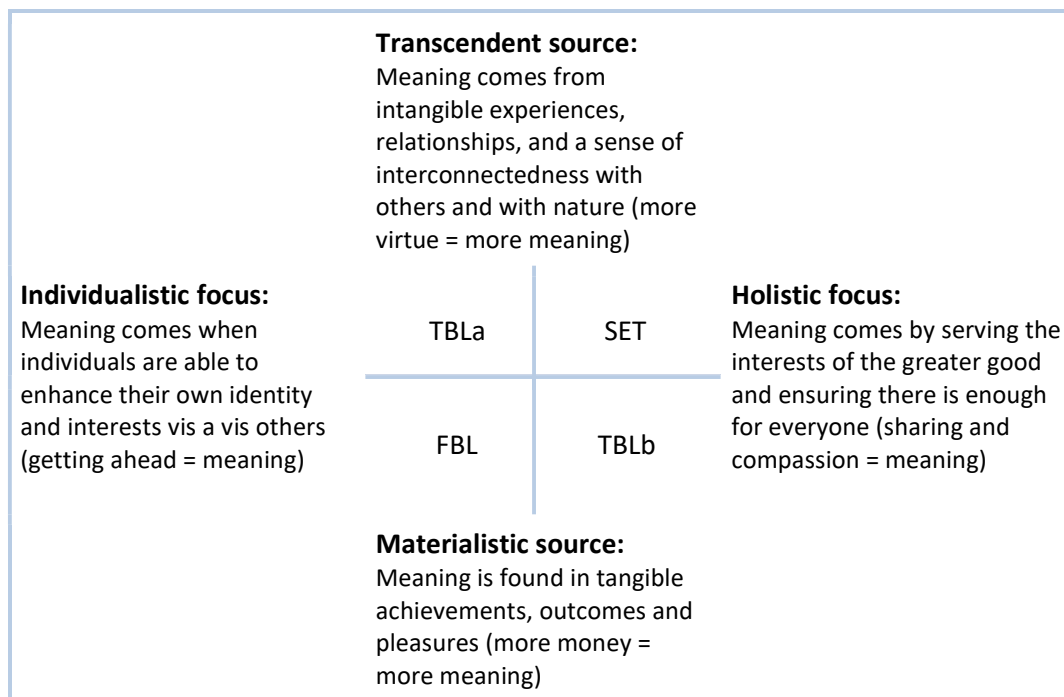
MANAGEMENT AND SOCIAL WELL-BEING: MEANINGFUL WORK, RELATIONSHIPS, & PEACE

CHAPTER 5

This chapter is organized around the three fundamental components that contribute to social well-being: meaningful work, meaningful relationships, and the opportunity to work in environments that are characterized by peace and social justice.

Meaningful Work

In order to understand meaningful work, it is helpful to think first about the meaning of life. Questions about the meaning of life have been pondered for millennia, but there is still no universally accepted understanding of what makes life meaningful. In part this may be because the meaning of life is shaped by our context and environment. Because the context and environment of humankind has changed a lot over time (e.g., from hunter-gatherer to post-modern societies), the way we think about the meaning of life is also changing. Even so, there are two dimensions that are helpful for understanding the meaning of life: the *source* of meaning (transcendent vs. tangible), and the *focal point* of meaning (individualistic vs. holistic).



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Meaningful work *enhances the meaning of life of those doing the work.* Because people spend so much time at work, it becomes a primary source of their purpose, identity, and belonging. For over thirty years Americans have said that meaningful work is more important to them than income, job security, and promotions. Research has shown that meaningful work influences many of the most important outcomes in organizational studies, including job performance, job satisfaction, work motivation, engagement, absenteeism, empowerment, stress, organizational commitment and identification, and customer satisfaction. According to the three key criteria identified in the literature, work is more meaningful for people who:

1. Experience a fit between their job and their sense of purpose/true self (e.g., their job is consistent with what they perceive to be the meaning of life);
2. Believe that their work gives them power and opportunity to make a positive difference in the world; and
3. Feel valued and a sense of belongingness in their workplace.

The SET approach to meaningful work

Rather than instrumentalize mindfulness to serve an organization's financial well-being, a holistic understanding of mindfulness requires rethinking the concept of how and why we work. SET management takes seriously the warning given by Max Weber, who characterized FBL and TBL management as: "Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved." A SET approach also acknowledges Adam Smith's concern that productivity-maximizing practices such as the division of labor would result in workers becoming "as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become."

The SET approach:

- Argues that more meaning comes from giving than from taking (see Chapter 14). SET management underscores the idea that people find their jobs more meaningful the more assistance and support they *provide* to others (e.g., opportunities to care for/assist/mentor/support a colleague).
- Is consistent with the growing voluntary simplicity movement. It recognizes that social well-being does not come from having more than enough stuff, but rather from doing what is meaningful and earning enough money.
- Recognizes that management practices that increase the gap between rich and poor are problematic. Even people from relatively wealthy countries are challenging systems that they see as unjust, even when those systems serve their own financial self-interests.
- Finds support in the increasing interest among management practitioners and scholars in spirituality and religion. Four of every five professors in the U.S. (81%) describe themselves as spiritual persons. Three of every five business professors also think that the spiritual dimension of faculty members' lives has a place in their jobs as academics, and one of three business professors think that colleges should be concerned about facilitating students' spiritual development. We also know that four out of five students (80%) have an interest in spirituality, and that almost half (48%) of incoming college students believe that it is "very important" or "essential" that their college encourages their personal expression of spirituality. Even so, students say that professors do not encourage such discussion (62%), nor do they raise questions about the meaning and purpose of life (56%).

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Relationships

It is noteworthy that when management books or courses talk about interpersonal relationships—be they relationships with co-workers or with suppliers or managers—it is primarily in terms of their instrumental qualities, with an emphasis on social skills that enable managers to increase workers' motivation and productivity, to negotiate a lower price from suppliers, or to increase customer loyalty. These are called *instrumental* skills, because they focus on how we can “use” other people like we use instruments to get something accomplished. In contrast, the purpose of *non-instrumental* relationship skills is to develop and deepen interpersonal connections for their own sake, to share joy and excitement and grief and loss, and to foster love, trust, and mutual acceptance. Surprisingly little discussion or research looks at social skills for facilitating non-instrumental friendships with co-workers, suppliers, and customers, which are the settings where we spend a large portion of our lives. And yet, many people would agree that non-instrumental friendships are crucial to social well-being and a meaningful life.

The SET approach to relationships

The SET approach takes what are conventionally viewed as instrumental relationships, and (re)infuses them with non-instrumental meaning. So, for example, a SET financial services firm does not sell as much product as possible in order to maximize its own profits; rather, it seeks to live up to its name and truly serve the needs of its customers. In SET organizations co-workers become friends whom you look forward to spending the day with as you work alongside them to serve customers. Co-workers are much more than “human resources” that you negotiate with to get instrumental work accomplished. Even suppliers and competitors become friends.

Compassion means standing alongside and doing what you can to support people who are suffering. In management terms, it means creating organizational structures and systems that address the needs of people who are suffering, perhaps especially people who may not have much in the way of instrumental resources to offer in return. SET management's emphasis on compassion is consistent with people's values, but often inconsistent with their socially-constructed expectations of management. For example, freshman students at Harvard University consistently ranked compassion near the top of their personal values (and power and wealth near the bottom), but ranked compassion near the bottom of what they thought Harvard stood for (and ranked success at the top).

Gratitude can help people to become more content with having enough (not always needing more), which in turn is an important step in ensuring that others have enough and promoting pro-social relationships in the workplace. Managers who set up organizational structures and systems that model and encourage members to express gratefulness will in turn foster values consistent with persistent gratitude (e.g., humility, benevolence), which will in turn foster collective gratitude at an organizational level (e.g., corporate social responsibility).

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Peace and Social Justice

There are two basic ways of understanding peace: 1) as the presence of freedom and harmony, and 2) as the absence of war and conflict. The first approach is consistent with ancient ideas like *shalom* and

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shanti, which envision a time when everyone has enough and there is mutual understanding and respect within and among communities. Part of the reason that this vision has failed is because humankind has developed an insatiable appetite for more. Again, this is different from how things were for the first 30,000 years of humanity prior to the advent of money, when we harvested as much food as we needed (not more) and we travelled light. By today's standards it was a largely egalitarian existence.

The SET approach to peace and social justice

SET management emphasizes a proactive role for businesses to develop social justice and peace. For example, as stated in the 2009 Caux Round Table (CRT) Principles of Business: "while laws and market forces are necessary, they are insufficient guides for responsible business conduct." In other words, SET management encourages businesses to go beyond merely obeying the law, and instead actually create positive social externalities even if doing so does not maximize profits. This is illustrated in the first two of CRT's Principles for Responsible Globalization:

Principle #1: "As responsible citizens of the local, national, regional, and global communities in which they operate, businesses share a part in shaping the future of those communities," and

Principle #2: "Businesses established in foreign countries to develop, produce, or sell should also contribute to the social advancement of those countries by creating productive employment and helping to raise the purchasing power of their citizens. Businesses also should contribute to human rights, education, welfare, and vitalization of the countries in which they operate."

Egalicentrism is characterized by two-way, give-and-take communication that fosters mutual understanding and community. SET management does not try to impose a "one size fits all" management style in foreign countries (ethnocentrism), nor does it simply accept that "local managers know best" (polycentrism). Rather, SET management recognizes that international management works best when people from different cultures interact with and learn from one another, resulting in knowledge and practices that neither could imagine on their own. Egalicentrism is not so much picking and choosing the "best of" practices around the world as it is developing new approaches by working alongside people who are different.

In terms of Porter's diamond, when it comes to international operations, SET management is especially interested in countries that have a mutual interest in improving social well-being by: 1) working with government to promote social responsibility; 2) establishing and nurturing local networks that support responsible business; 3) training and developing appropriate human resources, suppliers, and financial institutions that support responsible business; and 4) educating local consumers about the merits of responsibly produced outputs.

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