

Towards a right to meaningful work in supply chain ecosystems

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1. Is the provision of meaningful work a moral concern (and hence an object for justice)?



- Theme one – Corporate Power
 - Complexity, hybridity and systemic risk.
 - Extended responsibilities of corporations, including making a contribution to the creation of public goods.
 - Increasing inter-dependence of organisations (public and private), leading to observations of a ‘Collaboration Imperative’ or ‘shared-power, no-one-wholly-in charge world’ (Crosby & Bryson, 2010).

- Theme two – Changing Nature of Work
 - Technological shifts, precarious work, empty labour, activated leisure, life as work.
 - Ill-being (individual, organisational and social) arising from non-meaningful work.

- A recognition of the interests workers have in work which is engaging, worthwhile, meaningful:
 - 2015 YouGov Poll – 37% of UK workers said that their work makes no meaningful contribution to the world (25% of US workers).
 - Employee engagement reduced to a managerial instrument for the extraction of discretionary effort.

- A right to meaningful work – improved bargaining power and human capability formation.

2. Theoretical Treatments of Meaningful Work



- A preference in the market (Arneson, 1987) –
 - ‘the good life includes meaningful work, and [...] what we fundamentally owe to one another is a fair distribution of good quality life’ (Arneson, 2009)
- A human good (Rawls, 1971)
- A distributive good (Arnold, 2012)
- A fundamental human need (Yeoman, 2014)

3. What is meaningfulness? (a distinct ethical value)



- Frankl (1978; 1988) says that the search for meaning, or the ‘will to meaning’, is a universal human motivation which addresses our unavoidable need for a sense that our lives are worth living.
- **‘Meaning arises when subjective attraction meets objective attractiveness’**, where the experience of meaningfulness is more likely to occur when a person becomes actively connected to a worthy object, or something or someone of value, such that they are ‘gripped, excited, involved by it’ (Wolf, 2010)
- How we make meanings, and what we do with them, is not simply a private concern. It is also of public interest because, as meaning-makers, we contribute collectively to a common-pool resource of values which can be positive or negative; promoting or inhibiting a sense of meaningfulness.

4. The Structure of Meaningful Work

1. Objective account of meaningfulness

'your life is meaningful to the extent that you actively contribute to making the world a better place or to promoting "the good."' (Campbell & Nyholm, 2014: 3)

Independent value
(valuable, worthwhile, significance, importance, relevance, contribution)

2. Subjective account of meaningfulness

'life or activity is meaningful to the extent that the individual in question takes satisfaction in it or derives a sense of fulfillment from it' (Campbell & Nyholm, 2014: 5).

Individual satisfaction
(self-expression, self-realisation, growth, happiness, wholeness, integration, empowerment, self-esteem)

Aim-fulfilment
(achieving one's aims)

Becoming a Valuer

Capabilities for meaningfulness
– judging and feeling
Equal Status as Co-authorities
in meaning-making

4. Content of Action

Constitutive elements

(autonomy as non-alienation, freedom as non-domination and recognition as being seen as a dignified person)

Goal-directed

(larger purpose and local/individual goals)

Values-driven

(collective and personal values)

3. Hybrid account:

processes integrating objective/subjective dimensions

'subjective attraction meets objective attractiveness' (Wolf 2010: 9)

Purposing

Judging

Appraising

Evaluating

Interpreting

Sensing

5. Explaining the Framework



- The framework brings philosophical theories of meaningfulness together with the psychology, organisation studies and social science literature on meaningfulness.
- The hybrid account of meaningfulness in Box 3 combines the objective account (independent value) in Box 1 with the subjective account (satisfaction) in Box 2.
- Box 3: The social science literature indicates a range of processes involved in the social construction of meaningfulness, such as judging, appraising, evaluating, interpreting. Such interactive processes can be fostered by organisations through voice mechanisms such as representation and participation. Voice maintains meaningful work as a capacious ideal which is generative of a rich common-pool resource of positive meanings.
- Box 4: The interactive processes of Box 3 are more likely to be fostered in organisations where the content of work includes shared control (autonomy), non-dominated relationships of respect and care (freedom), and being seen as a dignified person (social recognition). The philosophy literature corrects organisational studies assumptions that purposeful action is always goal directed behaviour. Purposeful action can also be non-teleological and value-driven.
- We are participants in crafting meaningfulness. This means that we must become valuers, equipped with capabilities for making meanings and invested with the status as equal co-authorities in meaning making.

6. An interest-based argument for a right to meaningful work



- Rights specify the interests we have in living a life we have reason to value, given the kinds of creatures we are.
- Rights make the rights-holder better off: 'X has a right if X can have rights, and, other things being equal, an aspect of X's well-being (his interest) is a sufficient reason for holding some other person(s) to be under a duty' (Raz 1986, 166).
- A person is harmed when their fundamental needs remain unmet because, in such circumstances, they are 'deprived of activities and experiences that answer such interests' (Thomson, 2005: 177).
- Meaningfulness is a fundamental human need because it identifies and satisfies what is of profound importance for living a human kind of life
- A right to MW grounds our human status as co-authorities in meaning-making. Feinberg (1980) addresses the status-conferring benefits of human rights as having the capacity to 'stand up like men' – that is, to being seen and recognised by others as having an equal status to every other person.
- A right to MW entitles us to work which is structured by the goods of autonomy, freedom and dignity – which are inescapable interests for leading a life we can judge to be worth living.

7. Being Seen – a moral response to distant others in global supply chains



- What are the relevant features of persons embedded in supply chain practices to which a moral response is required?
 - Vulnerable and needy; Universal types; Particular persons.
- A right to MW involves seeing others as particular persons with lives of their own to lead.
- To lead one's own life involves becoming a self-determining being – having our needs met so we can lead lives we have reason to value. This applies to all humans qua human beings, and demands that we 'see' others across separations of culture, power and distance as 'whole, fully integrated human beings, with names, faces, families and pasts' (Freeman, 2008)
- Being seen involves:
 - Collapsing separations through reconceiving distant *places* as inter-related and mutually constitutive *spaces*.
 - Goes beyond a concern for welfare, and even respect for others as moral agents, to a rich understanding of others as whole persons
 - Reimagining supply chains as systems of social cooperation

8. The Community of Rights



‘[...] a human society based on positive human rights requires not only that persons refrain from coercing or harming one another but also that they help one another. This requirement of help is not, however, indiscriminate or open-ended; **it is concerned rather to enable all persons equally to become and to function as productive agents who can provide for their own needs, while also making an effective contribution to the fulfilment of other persons’ needs and desires on the basis of mutual respect and cooperation.** Thus positive rights serve to relate persons to one another through mutual awareness of important needs and, as a consequence, affirmative ties of equality and mutual aid. Hence, if there are indeed positive human rights that must be acknowledged as such by every rational agent, then it provides a rational and mandatory basis for the conciliation of rights and community and thus for the mutuality and solidarity of the community of rights’ (Gewirth, Community of Rights: 31–32).

9. The Integration Imperative in Supply Chains



- Supply chains are replacing organisations as the main competitive entity in global markets (Carter and Northcote, 2006).
- Carter and Rogers (2008: 368) describe integrated supply chain management as ‘the strategic, transparent integration, and achievement of an organization’s social, environmental, and economic goals in the systemic coordination of key inter-organizational business processes for improving the long-term economic performance of the individual company and its supply chains’
- Unitary supply chains involve ‘pooled interdependent tasks’ (Thompson, 1967), ‘reciprocal interdependence’ (Crook and Coombs, 2007), ‘mutual dependence’ and coordination of trusting relationships (Tolhurst, 2001; Balou et al, 2000).
- A partnership approach to joint learning requires ‘enhanced relationships’ (Beske et al, 2008) and a long term, cooperative orientation by suppliers who are valued for their loyalty and commitment.

10. Supply Chains as systems of social cooperation



- Supply chains are unfolding/emerging systems of cooperation in which ‘the complex moral judgements that must be made need to – in the spirit of supply chain analysis – **entail some consideration of the whole system**’ (New, 272).
- Cooperative interaction: ‘people more or less voluntarily engaging in activities and social relations according to terms of cooperation that they accept and regard as more or less fair, and from which everyone benefits in some manner’ (Freeman, 334).
- For Rawls, systems of social cooperation determine the conditions and possibilities for individual lives: ‘**social cooperation is necessary to our development as persons, the realization of our reasoning and moral powers, the development of our social capacities, and our having a conception of the good**’ (Freeman, 421).
- Young’s (2004) social connection model of responsibility and structural injustice: ‘produced and reproduced by thousands or millions of people usually acting with institutional rules and according to practices that most people regard as morally acceptable’.

11. Justice demands the creation of a basic structure in supply chains



- Rawls (Theory of Justice) applies justice to the basic structure – that is, to the web of political and social institutions, organisations and roles which form the bedrock of cooperation.
- Abizadeh (2007) argues that social cooperation is ‘a *fair* or *just* system of social interaction’. It is social interaction which is the object of justice, and the basic structure is necessary to turn social interaction into fair cooperation.
- Since ‘social interaction is a necessary and sufficient condition of justice’, justice must attend to the social interaction upon which cooperation depends, where **‘a basic structure is the indispensable means by which a system of social coordination or interaction could become a fair system of social cooperation’** (ibid: 329).
- Justice demands the creation of a basic structure as a pre-condition of cooperation.
- Supply chains are social and economic entities with *de facto* semi-independent status in which there are high levels of social interaction, but an incomplete or absent basic structure (for example, governance voids and uneven attempts to improve contributor influence and voice using multi-stakeholder initiatives).
- Justice applies to social interaction in supply chains, and requires the creation of a basic structure in order to ensure that cooperation is conducted under fair terms.

12. Meaningful work is needed to create the basic structure in global supply chains



- Rawls argues that cooperation depends upon human rights: **‘What have come to be called human rights are recognized as necessary conditions of any system of social cooperation. When they are regularly violated, we have command by force, a slave system, and no cooperation of any kind’** (LP, 68).
- A basic structure is a necessary condition of fair social cooperation. Creating the basic structure involves the social interactions of individuals who collectivise their joint efforts under a shared purpose.
- Social interaction brings organisations into being: ‘organisations are sites of continuously changing human action and organization is the making of form, the patterned unfolding of human action’ (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002: 577). **Justice therefore applies not simply to social interaction per se, but more precisely to the *interactive processes* of human action through which the basic structure comes into being.** The same interactive processes through which people integrate the objective/subjective dimensions of MW.
- An obligation to contribute to such processes grounds a right to meaningful work: firstly, it advances the moral claim that human action must be structured by the necessary goods of autonomy, freedom and dignity; and secondly, it demonstrates an instrumental claim that creating a basic structure depends upon human capabilities for meaning-making.
- But organisation building is a site of contestation and power – the resistance of workers and suppliers to change for example is generally noted in pejorative terms, justifying managers being afforded meaning-making privileges to create and dispose of meanings and cognitive framings.
 - Privileged declarative powers of managers
 - Alienated meaning-making capabilities of workers

13. A right to meaningful work in global supply chains



- Meaningful work is a productive good (rather than distributive good) needed to produce the basic structure upon which fairness in social cooperation depends.
- A right to MW stimulates the design and organisation of work so that the social interactions between people who are contributing their efforts are constituted by the goods of autonomy, freedom and dignity.
- A right protects against alienation of meaning-making capabilities by:
 - grounding our status as co-authorities in meaning-making;
 - avoiding premature or permanent closures of meaning to the benefit of more powerful parties; and
 - generating a common-pool resource of positive meanings upon which the prospects for incorporating meaningfulness into individual lives depends.

‘Human behaviour is really human to the extent to which it means acting into the world. This, in turn, implies being motivated by the world. In fact, the world toward which a human being transcends itself is a world replete with meanings that constitute reasons to act and full as well of other human beings to love’ (Frankl, 2004: 93).