

Quality of working life research: V. Creating real value for customers and the environment

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Abstract: Creating real value is one of the four dimensions of developing the quality of work life besides the quality of life, mastery, and fellowship. The organization is our chance to become valuable to a much wider circle than the one closest to us. By being part of a valuable organization, we create genuine value, not just market value. This article is about how we can create real value and how organizations become valuable to customers, clients, patients, and the environment. In order to create real value, it is necessary to adhere to good and viable values that allow us to create clear preconditions for quality of life instead of wasting these preconditions. The transition towards creating proper values requires a profound re-thinking of our attitudes. To this end, customer satisfaction will be subordinate to a more global perspective on production. It may well be better to remain in your job and change a bad company than fleeing to another job. This must be considered an emergency solution. The world needs competent people exactly where change is needed. We can all grow and develop, thus becoming more valuable. Every one of us can be useful by contributing our individual skills to the environment. Consider this a personal obligation. Put in another way, if we do not put our uniqueness and best talents to proper use, we betray ourselves as well as others.

Keywords: Quality of Life, QOL, quality of working life, QWL, philosophy, human development, public health

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INTRODUCTION

You can question whether a company really creates value with its product or services or not. It earns money, of course, but does it create genuine value? How beneficial are the product and the activities? Do they contribute to making this world a better place to live in?

In order to create real value, it is necessary to adhere to good and viable values. These values are about satisfying people's real needs, maybe also those of animals and plants, without destroying the world we inherited and which our children will inherit from us in the future. If we live up to values that respect these conditions, we build up instead of breaking down. We support other people in their self-expression instead of wasting global resources on superfluous consumption. We create clear preconditions for quality of life instead of wasting these preconditions.

A person may be more or less valuable. Some people are not of great value to themselves or in their personal relationships. Others know how to gain from life as well as being pleasant company for others. We can all grow and develop, thus becoming more valuable. Every one of us can be useful by contributing our individual skills to the environment.

- How valuable are you in relation to your potential value?
- Could you grow to be twice as valuable to your spouse?
- Your children?
- Your friends?
- Could you become twice as valuable to your organization?
- Your customers?

It feels good to be useful. Quality-of-life surveys have shown that people who feel useful, also as a group, are happy, whereas those who do not feel useful are unhappy. You can contribute to a shift in attitudes and practice. In this way you will make a significant change not only for yourself but also for your place of work and your environment.

CREATING REAL VALUE FOR CUSTOMERS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

In this article, we shall have a look at how organizations become valuable to customers/clients/patients/users and the environment. Let us start this difficult subject with an example from the world of health care in order to illustrate how much value can be created.

A hospital department with poor ability to create value

This department has specialized in treating breast cancer. The physicians do all they can to fight the cancer with all means available: chemotherapy, radiation, and surgery. A considerable amount of money is spent on research, and the physicians often participate in conferences abroad to present their results.

They are proud that over the past thirty years science globally has succeeded in doubling the lifetime of cancer patients (even though critics argue that it is because the diagnosis is made at an earlier stage, which makes women aware of their cancer for a relatively longer period). However, a new type of 'troublesome and critical' patient has appeared on the scene. She asks questions about the customary treatment or refuses to accept it. Some nurses are becoming aware that patients must be involved much more in the decisions made about their treatment. But since patients lack professional knowledge, physicians consider this proposal a problematic one.

Patients who undergo the prescribed treatment often feel very bad physically during the course of the treatment (often for the rest of their lives). The physicians hope for a break-through with new products and focuses on molecular research rather than involving psychological and social events in the treatment. Women do not think that they obtain much help from the cancer department.

A hospital department creating great value

The department has specialized in treating breast cancer. It has become evident over the past ten years that, according to statistics, traditional treatment of advanced breast cancer with chemotherapy, radiation, and surgery prolongs the patient's life by only a few months. Further-

more, the treatment often ruins the patients' quality of life. In this department experiments are initiated - where ordinary treatment is being offered to all patients (but not always accepted) and supplemented with a clearly articulated request to the patients to take very good care of themselves. The department runs different projects to enhance the women's self-esteem and self-confidence to make them act more constructively in life. The physicians were surprised at preliminary results showing that patients can do far more for themselves than could have been hoped for.

Some of the otherwise doomed women join groups of twenty persons. They exchange views on their joys and sorrows, values and goals in life for about one and a half hour per week. Quite often, they succeed in gaining deeper insight as well as improving their quality of life. They not only get better but also live twice as long as patients who do not join an existential group. The experiment leading to this surprising result was carried out by David Spiegel and associates at Stanford University, USA and reported on in the *Lancet* in 1989 (1). Many of the women consider the cancer department a most valuable experience.

The good car factory – bad in the old days – the 1990's

Not many years ago, this car factory let its product burn off a considerable amount of leaded petrol and diesel oil which polluted the environment. In those days cars transformed a large quantity of valuable raw materials into gigantic quantities of worthless waste. For a while it looked as if the factory would continue contributing to global environmental deterioration, but then a niche appeared on the market, created by the political consumer. Far-sighted leaders seized the opportunity and arranged for the production to become viable.

Today the factory creates real significant value. Customers are more content with the cars now, since their conscience is clear. Technological advances that led to this improvement were, first and foremost, good rechargeable and re-usable batteries. After that came the durable and efficient electrometer. The very best thing to happen was the new effective generation of solar cells that keep the car recharged all day.

The car proved fully viable when re-usable panels and spare parts became available. Non-polluting chemicals are now used to produce water-based paints. Not to mention the car's various built-in computers now made of fiber-optic materials that do not waste energy. Thus neither nature nor we will be contaminated in the future. These materials are fully degradable in ordinary sea sand.

Will this car be for sale? Give it 20 to 30 years—

and a bit of help. Fortunately, it is on its way. Ecology and advanced technology supplement each other wonderfully.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO CREATE REAL VALUE?

Companies create value when they produce products or services for sale. At the same time they consume energy, water and raw materials and produce direct and indirect pollution, contributing to the transformation of natural resources into waste deposits. It is debatable whether the consumers are better off after all. They will not become healthier or happier. Maybe they merely waste their time, energy and money on the product.

It is questionable whether a company really creates value with its product or services. It earns money, of course, but does it create genuine value? How beneficial are its product and its activities? Does it contribute to making this world a better place to live in?

In order to create real value, it is necessary to adhere to good and viable values. These values are about satisfying people's real needs, maybe also those of animals and plants, without destroying the world we inherited and which our children will inherit from us in the future. If we live up to values that respect these conditions, we build up instead of breaking down. We support other people in their self-expression instead of wasting global resources on superfluous consumption. We create clear preconditions for quality of life instead of wasting these preconditions.

The organization is our chance to become valuable to a much wider circle than the one closest to us. By being part of a valuable organization we create genuine value, not just market value. Often the demand for goods is not grounded in genuine and profound needs. It may derive from more or less artificial needs such as cultural trends, fashion whims, commercials and materialism have imposed upon us. We eventually realize that these are status symbols or masks that we could really do without.

There are many perceptions of quality. Today several companies are content with a standard of quality expressed by customer satisfaction: if the customers get what they expect, the supplier has measured up to expectations. A well-known example is the concept of Total Quality Management (TQM). The problem is, however, that the standard of quality does not call for a further investigation into the quality of the demand, that is to say, which part of the demand for goods may be detrimental to the environment, the local area and its quality of life, etc.

In order to create real value, more is needed than

just customer satisfaction. A company would have to evaluate whether it is actually creating value (other than employment) by means of its products and services. The good organization usually creates far more value than customers do, simply by demanding more. In this respect, managers and employees use comprehensive internal standards of quality, which help customers increase their knowledge about products, materials, services and so on.

The transition toward creating proper values requires a profound rethinking of our attitudes. To this end, customer satisfaction will be subordinate to a more global perspective on production. Our culture is said to be materialistic, short-sighted and therefore often quite stupid. It may be a fact that we take less interest in existential values, such as love of life and the environment, than in power, money, status, consumer goods, and comfort—which are superficial and culturally determined values.

If you think about it, there are private and public organizations that, for various reasons, clearly do not exist in order to create genuine value. Perhaps you work for such an organization. If you do, it is time to take responsibility and start improving your organization. It may be your opening to find the challenge of your life and to make a contribution to a better world.

It may well be better to remain in your job and change a bad company than fleeing to another job. This must be considered an emergency solution. The world needs competent people exactly where change is needed.

Try reconsidering how value is created in your organization. Please try to answer the following questions:

- How good is the quality of the products/services?
- How resource-conscious and viable is the production process?
- How successful is the organization measured in terms of its stated objectives for the future?
- How efficient is the organization?
- How well prepared is your company to take a lead and to pioneer new paths?
- How beneficial is the organization to the employees?
- How useful is the organization to the local environment?

Becoming a valuable human being

A person may be more or less valuable. Some people are not of great value to themselves or in their personal

relationships. Others know how to gain from life as well as being pleasant company for others. Things fit together. If you do not like yourself and your life, it is difficult for you to contribute to the world.

We can all grow and develop, thus becoming more valuable. Every one of us can be useful by contributing our individual skills to the environment. Consider this a personal obligation. Put in another way, if we do not put our uniqueness and best talents to proper use, we betray ourselves as well as others.

How valuable are you in relation to your potential value? Could you grow to be twice as valuable to your spouse? Your children? Your friends? Could you become twice as valuable to your organization? Your customers?

'Well, maybe I could,' you think, 'but why should I?' The answer to this question is very simple: Because you are no more valuable to yourself than you are to others, and vice versa. It feels good to be useful. Quality-of-life surveys have shown that people who feel useful, also as a group, are happy, whereas those who do not feel useful are unhappy.

We are more closely tied to the world than we think. Our freedom not to be useful is limited. We are obliged to be useful and resourceful beings. This is dictated by our basic nature as human beings.

A valuable person is one who leads a life in accordance with good and stable values. A valuable organization also manifests good and enduring values. But why is it that people often adhere to two sets of values, one for private life (with love a dominant feature), another set of values for professional life, primarily concerned with power and money? How does it impact on a person's life when the two sets of values do not harmonize? Is it likely that such a person can become really valuable to himself/herself and to others?

Make your organization valuable

When you have found out who you are personally and professionally, and when you have grown professionally, the time has come for you to make a difference to the whole. If you understand what is going on in your organization, you will quickly gain understanding as to how to increase your influence.

If the organization wants to create more genuine value for customers, a change to better values is needed. What are the good values? Let us make a distinction between our personal values at work and the shared values formulated in an organization's mission statement. Good personal working values refer, for the most part, to commitment, mastery, and management. They are

about the experience of creating value. In principle, these values might also carry the organization, but it is not as simple as that.

An organization has its own values. They focus on survival and growth, making a profit for the owners and satisfying the employees, economically and otherwise. These values are about achieving a goal, for instance a new product or a service that is unique.

A healthy organization takes an overall and global view: We want to participate in creating the future the way we like it. We must all accept our share in that responsibility. It is urgent that we make suitable investments in research that will secure the company's profitability in the long run. We must not make do with short-sighted solutions.

However, it is not an easy task to determine the company's values. Often, one thing is proposed and something entirely different is carried out. It takes great individual efforts to determine what the values of the organization really are in respect of its overall philosophy, its view of people as well as of itself, its conventional wisdom, its position, and responsibility. Often the values have not been formulated. They may very well be conflicting. Companies often practice double standards. The working environment, for instance, is considered important until that environment requires expenditure. Nature must be preserved and protected, until the day production is interfered with.

Today, there are many good things to be done if you want to make sure that good values are implemented. Environmental concern, life-cycle analysis, and projects add to the development of zest. Furthermore, there are innovative workshops for management combined with dialogue with the industrial council. If you have a clear perception of where you are heading, action is possible.

Lots of good tools are marketed at a reasonable price, enhancing the possibility of sustaining a process of development directed to employees and managers becoming more alert and more oriented to value. If you believe in fighting to make the difference, the door will be open for deriving knowledge and strength from the great hidden reserve of human potential. Awareness of the company's values puts you in a powerful position. It would be very hard for anyone within the company to reject criticism of values which are basically hostile to people or nature. You can develop values within the company if you really believe that you are able to make a difference by seeing what is wrong and acting to put it right. This is an enormous challenge that requires all of us to raise our level of awareness.

Our central conviction with regard to humanity is

that you can make the difference, if you want to. You can contribute to a shift in attitudes and practice. In this way you will make a significant change not only for yourself but also for your place of work and your environment. People who fight for their personal values to be implemented in the company contribute to making a difference. It is people like this who make the world a better place. Why should you not become one of them?

Technology and value

Today a good machine can easily do the work of 100 employees. In a modern IT-company work is not so much about your personal initiative but rather about letting technology do the work. All processes must be carefully and precisely managed with a view to the complex realities within each section, the company and the environment. Work is no longer oil stains and sweat but an alert handling of energy and information. Our present society has turned into an awfully efficient but also very complex world and we have seen just the beginning of the IT revolution.

The immense power gained from technology means that contemporary employees and managers must be highly conscious and alert. Fortunately, consciousness and alertness are original features of the human character. This is all we long for, deep inside. Our feelings of being present, fully alive and in line with reality will not manifest themselves fully until we grow fully conscious and alert.

Most people are aware of the potential of science and technology. The most efficient machines available these days may cause world-wide pollution. We can waste global raw materials in no time and before knowing it we may have ruined nature and thus the basis of our existence. We simply have to get technological development under control. Our last chance is to change the values and attitudes within organizations to assure that what we produce contributes to creating appropriate values.

DISCUSSION

Real value might be more strongly connected to our common survival on the planet than most people realise. We are in the middle of a technical revolution and explosive population growth; we are completely transforming the surface of the planet. We suggest that real value very soon will be about contributing to the global eco-system, more than anything. This demands a highly developed consciousness and maybe the development of human consciousness itself is the next area we need to focus on for man to create value and the

human race to survive. Most interestingly, the development of consciousness and self-insight is closely connected to development of sexual ability and the ability to love others and function socially. Medicine might very well be about developing the human consciousness as well, as health and happiness is highly dependent on this (2-16).

Our central conviction with regard to humanity is that you can make the difference, if you want to. You can contribute to a shift in attitudes and practice. In this way you will make a significant change not only for yourself, but also for your place of work and your environment. People who fight for their personal values to be implemented in the company contribute to making a difference. It is people like this who make the world a better place. Why should you not become one of them?

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