Meaningfulness and organising for sustainable futures

Ruth Yeoman

University of Oxford, Kellogg College, United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

To maintain complex civilisation within planetary boundaries, we must secure a whole 'system of systems' transformation of our activities. In this article, based on the lecture notes for my keynote speech at the International Conference on Critical and Radical Humanist Work and Organizational Psychology, I explore the ethical dimensions of making organisations that can help us improve our collective decision-making and at the same time become persons whose acting and being is consistent with the sustainability imperative. I outline a human capability for ethical organising which is directed towards making organisations that generate life-value, or those resources by which we cultivate the relational and material conditions for stewarding and sustaining all living beings and things. The „value of meaningfulness" and „mutuality as an organising principle" afford conversion factors for translating our general „will to form" into a human capability for ethically desirable organising. Meaningful work provides action contexts for people to discover, protect and develop values that matter to them. The moral value of meaningfulness is also productive for breaking into vicious cycles of corporate alienation that prevent the emergence of organisations as collective moral agents, characterised by integrity and empathy. I conclude that we need a fresh democratic dispensation – one that covers our associational life across all fields of endeavour.

Keywords

Meaningful work – sustainability – alienation – organisational psychology

Our efforts to maintain global temperature rise below 1.5 degrees of pre-industrial levels are faltering due to economic fractures, corporate vested interests, and authoritarian state forces resisting change. I explore the relevance of meaningfulness to the organisations we need to motivate sustainability transitions. I extend this to our vision for what kinds of persons we have to become if we are to make possible future ecological civilisations, enabled by humanised modes of production. Given the scale of potential catastrophe, this is not easy. In witnessing events, we can become silent, unable to find the words to express what we see, shackling our sense of agency. Günther Anders expressed nuclear threat as the „unspeakable" where we are „mute towards the apocalypse" (Anders, 2019, p. 135; trans. Müller). But muteness does not have to be a totally negative experience. Staying with silence can be potent with reflection, struggle, and new beginnings. A withholding of comment so as to really attend to how matters stand for other beings and things. Consequently, muteness has something to offer a theory of transition and change. Muteness derives from the Latin verb *mutare* – to change or change oneself into. From this verb, we also get *mutual*, or having something in common and shared, as well as *mutant*, or something that is changing, shifting, and transforming. There is a link between the two. Risky changes-in-being are prolific with unexpected novelties, some monstrous, some generative of new ways of living together. To distinguish between desirable and undesirable changes, we need tools of ethical evaluation, combined with a suitable organising principle that will help us to augment potentially productive transformations. I bring forward two neglected sources for ethical evaluation in associational life: mutuality and meaningfulness. Mutuality operates as an organising principle which, via a release of voice, unlocks the moral value of meaningfulness as a standpoint for judgement. Organisations adopting meaningfulness and mutuality acquire the capacity to institute inclusive meaning-making that is hospitable to reflections emerging from silence. Participating in collective meaning-making processes enables organisational members to

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excavate novel or neglected meanings and enrich their understanding of how change impacts the beings and things that give meaning to their lives (Yeoman, 2020).

Organising for a change of the human heart

Relentless planetary temperature rise demands a whole 'system of systems' transformation of our activities. One that will have to be achieved through our many public, private and civic organisations. At the same time, we must make *ourselves* into the kinds of people who can live well together *through* these transitions, and into future ecological societies. In „To Have or To Be", Erich Fromm (1976, p. 8) says that „for the first time in history the physical survival of the human race depends on a radical change of the human heart". This seems impossibly difficult to achieve, yet also impossible not to try. To support such a change, we must make use of everything we know about how social structures shape human psychology. This includes making organisations so they manifest a collective psychology that facilitates our becoming persons whose acting and being is consistent with sustainable earth-human relations. However, the cultural psychologist Jerome Bruner (1990) in „Acts of Meaning" worries that our ways of making organisations are not addressing the challenges we face. He says: „For all our power to construct symbolic cultures and to set in place the institutional forms needed for their execution, we do not seem very adept at steering our creations towards ends we profess to desire" (Bruner, 1990, p. 23). In other words, we are failing to consistently produce organisations which can help us improve our collective decision-making. Organisations with better procedures for collective decision-making depend upon their members forming what Fromm calls „the social character orientation" – an orientation which helps us to become fully alert to how our activities impact the lives of other persons, beings, and natural ecosystems. Organisations that are normatively ordered by the meanings, values and narratives of a relevant collective psychology can help us choose to act towards other beings and things *„as if"* social character rooted in moral attentiveness is already widespread.

The human capability for ethical organising

With the possibility of behaving *„as if"* in mind, I outline here a human capability for ethical organising, or a human capability for collectively creating organisations with the characteristics for mediating improved decision-making and grounded in an eco-sensitive cultural psychology. This capability is directed towards making organisations that generate life-value, or those material, social, and cultural resources by which we cultivate the conditions for stewarding and sustaining all living beings and things. Organizational theorist Gibson Burrell (2013) says human beings possess a general capacity to form, or a „will to form" which is expressed through a continual process of „constant organizing of organizations" that seeks to „order the world into meaning" (Burrell, 2013, p. xxi and p. xix). With Nussbaum and Sen's (1993) human capability theory in mind, the „value of meaningfulness" and „mutuality as an organising principle" afford conversion factors for translating this „general capacity to form" into a „human capability for ethically desirable organising" (see Yeoman, 2020). This cashes out into various entitlements, such as the intrinsic goods of meaningful work – autonomy, freedom and dignity – as well a requirement for worker democracy (Yeoman, 2014a, 2014b). Mutuality, when enacted through institutionally rooted democratic voice, stimulates meaning flows around the values that people want to satisfy through associational life, providing resources for them to engage in practical reasoning, build up common knowledge, make collective decisions, and coordinate joint endeavour.

A human capability for ethical organising enables us to act *„as if"* the new social character orientation was already shaping our collective decision-making. In other words, to establish organisations where we can cultivate a new kind of social cognition, or our perceptions, information, and knowledge about others. The anthropologist Mary Douglas (1986) in „How Institutions Think" describes organisations as embodying „thought worlds", or organisational frameworks for social cognition which shape our thinking, feeling, and acting. She outlines a process of institution building, where: „the people are tempted out of their niches by new possibilities of exercising or evading control. Then they make new kinds of institutions, and the institutions make new labels, and the labels make new kinds of people" (Douglas, 1986, p. 108). Practical reasoning, or „what we ought to do" to navigate sustainability transitions, depends upon organisational thought worlds with the normative power to shape our thinking and feeling, directing us towards taking care of worthy objects, or those beings and things of independent value and moral significance that are impacted by climate change and sustainability efforts.

Ethically-oriented social cognition and principled meaning-making

The humanised mind stimulates active moral attentiveness to the condition of other beings and

things. Social cognition of this kind is formed through participation in what Bruner (1990) calls „principled" meaning-making or having a share of „a larger public process in which public meanings are negotiated" (Bruner, 1990, p. 13). Meaning-making forms culture and narratives, organises our thinking and feeling, filters information, builds up knowledge and understanding, and shapes our collective intentions and actions. For Bruner, principled meaning-making additionally requires a „moral stance" and a „rhetorical posture" (Bruner, 1990, p. 61). In my formulation of meaningful work, I use an ethic of care as a standpoint or moral stance for evaluating and justifying public meaning claims (Yeoman, 2014a, 2014b). Organisational members are afforded a rhetorical posture by being presented as moral „agents of construction" (O'Neill, 1996): Recognised as capable and equal co-authorities in meaning-making, and authorised to join with others in the gathering and ordering of ethical materials to achieve morally viable ends.

Overview of meaningfulness

I outline how meaningfulness can apply to sustainability transitions (Figure 1). Drawing from the philosophy of life meaning, I use the hybrid value of meaningfulness, which integrates the objective/ethical-moral and subjective / cognitive-emotional dimensions of meaning (Wolf, 2010). The moral value of meaningfulness combines objective moral value, or having good reasons for acting towards independently valuable objects, with subjective experience, or cultivating an ethically viable emotional engagement with those objects. This enables us to justify the reasons we have to act. People want to have something meaningful, worthwhile or significant to do as members of purposeful organisations that are worthy of their contributions. This drive for meaning is extremely difficult to eliminate. Indeed, people will use whatever materials are to hand, including poor quality and precarious work, to craft meaningfulness. For example, hospital cleaners see themselves as part of the care team looking after patients, and refuse collectors as stewarding the environment for future generations.

Organisations can institutionalise the value of meaningfulness through the governance of strategic meaning-systems and participatory ground up meaning-making that integrates processual elements of status and capabilities, means and ends, meaning sources and meaning systems, and social limits to publicly justifiable meanings. These elements establish the conditions for principled meaning-making, and afford the basis of a theory of change which can be applied to sustainability transitions (Yeoman, 2021). To be successful in our meaning-making efforts, we need to see ourselves as equal co-authorities in meaning-making, invested with the relevant status and capabilities. Together, status and capabilities equip us to participate in the evaluation and justification of meaning claims. Including all potential meaning-makers in principled meaning-making has consequential public impacts. When meanings emerge in public discourse, they become available for people to generate narratives that convey knowledge and facilitate coordination of the means and ends of collective action. Narratives are also carriers of

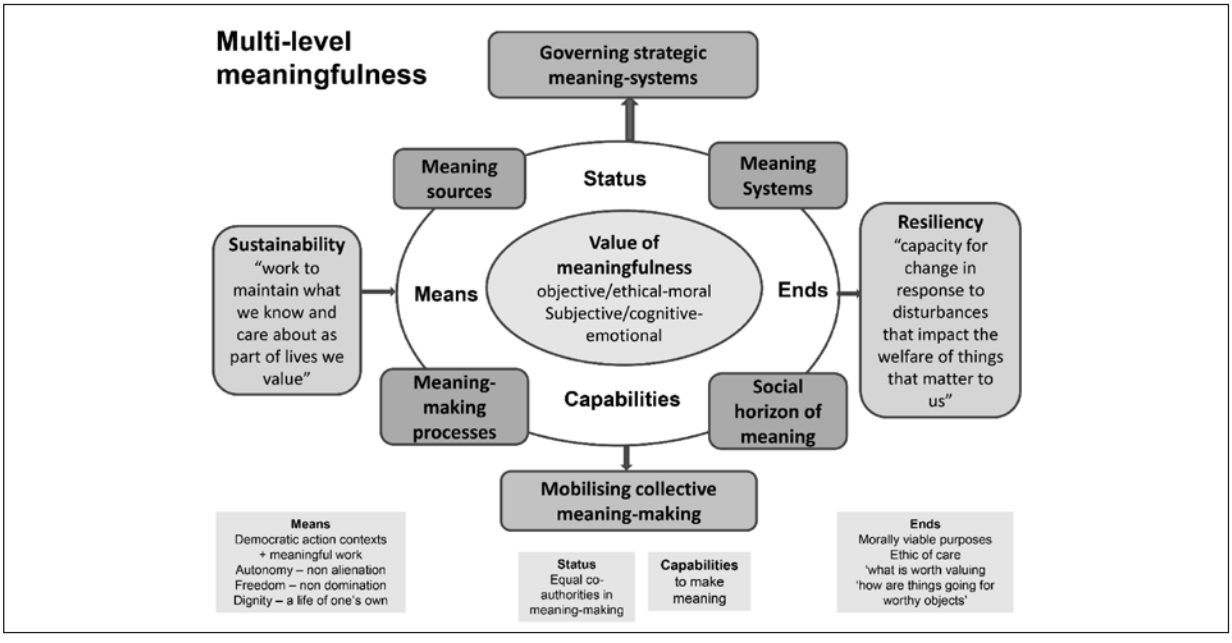

Figure 1: Multi-level meaningfulness (source: Yeoman, 2021).

values such as justice, fairness, and care. They provide ethical resources for ensuring that means and ends are ethically viable, justifiable in the public realm, and suitable for taking up into normatively desirable collective action. This extends to paid and unpaid work. In sum, work is meaningful when activities are structured by intrinsically valuable goods of autonomy, freedom, and dignity; are directed towards taking care of beings and things that have independent value and moral significance; and are experienced as emotionally engaging and worthwhile. Democratically arranged action contexts are important for ensuring that organisational members are afforded inclusive opportunities for connecting personal meaning to organisational meaning.

People draw upon varieties of meaning sources to create meaning-systems at multiple levels of organising. This can be a contentious and conflictual process as people negotiate interpretive differences and conciliate diverse meaning sources into at least temporarily stable meaning-systems. In examining the various sources and domains of meaning, Tatjana Schnell (2011) identifies generativity is one of the most important meaning sources. One that enables a person to integrate different kinds of meanings into a positive self-identity. She draws upon the psychologist Erik Erikson who described generativity as „a concern for guiding, nurturing, and establishing the next generation through an act of care“ (Schnell, 2011, p. 671). When we incorporate morally valuable persons or other valuable beings and things, into the meaningfulness of our lives, this does not mean we can do anything we like to them. Meaningfulness involves have a concern for how well things are going for those valuable objects, and how we can promote their flourishing. By participating in principled meaning-making, we can learn to evaluate how well we are doing to care, to steward, to maintain and repair. As part of principled meaning-making, an ethic of care helps us to describe a social horizon of legitimate meaning (Note, 2010). Fromm says that in the mode of being people find their self-identity in love as productive activity. In his words, love „implies caring for, knowing, responding, affirming, enjoying; the person, the tree, the painting, the idea. It means bringing to life…. It is a process, self-renewing and self-increasing“ (Fromm, 1976, p. 37).

Such a framing understands meaningfulness to be fundamentally relational and processual. In Robert Nozick's (1981) theory of value and meaning, meaningfulness illuminates our relational and interconnected reality. Nozick observes that the process of meaning-making is of intrinsic value, generative of personal distinctiveness, and collective patterns of living: „This process is valuable because, in addition to containing valuable unities as its stages, it itself constitutes a pattern which unifies the widest diversity of human activity. Into this patterned process fall our hopes and activities, our desires to attain and to transcend, our search for value and meaning.“ (Nozick, 1981, p. 616). In work and other action contexts such as, for example, citizen's urban place-making, meanings are immanent potentials, which remain pre-political until activated by public processes of deliberation and difference. Being able to justify meanings, and put them to use in collective practical reasoning, is therefore linked to belonging to organisations that integrate the governance of strategic meaning-systems with mobilising collective meaning-making at every level of the organisation. For this to operate, democratically arranged organisations are to be preferred, giving organisational members influence over the normative governance of strategic meaning-systems, so that they can subject these meaning-systems to public evaluation using democratic procedures rooted in principled meaning-making.

Sustainability and resiliency

When applied at different scales of organising in sustainability transitions the above framework illuminates the contradictions and paradoxes in collective action. For instance, transitions are shaped by a fundamental tension between sustainability and resiliency. The anthropologist Joseph Tainter (2006) comments that „people sustain what they value, which can only derive from what they know“ (Tainter, 2006, p. 92). Sustainability is a form of work by which we maintain what we know and care about as part of the lives we value. Resiliency is the capacity for change in response to disturbances that impact the welfare of things that matter to us. But sustainability and resiliency are in tension; we want to preserve and sustain those things that matter to us, but these things cannot remain unchanged under climate pressures. This can produce alienation – a feeling of not being in control, leading to frustrations, anxieties, and dread. However, this sense of alienation also makes the sustainability/resiliency tension a key site for potentially productive public meaning-making. Within a framework of multi-level meaningfulness, we can collectively explore diverse meanings thrown up the sustainability/resiliency tension, deepening our knowledge of other beings and things that matter to us – and how we can care for them as they are caught up in change.

A materialist ethic of care

Change which uses principled meaning-making in the collective action problems thrown up by sustainability / resiliency tensions needs an eco-sensitive ethic. One that can foster moral attentiveness, inform principled meaning-making, and help people act *„as if"* the new society is already upon them. As agents of construction, people can be sensitised to sustainability concerns when organisations introduce life-value concepts, devices, habits and procedures. For example, giving rivers legal status as persons, or understanding animals to have capabilities for flourishing, as well as culture and meaning of their own. And even extending care ethics to socialising artificial intelligences of our own creation. For example, in his concept of life-value, Jeff Noonan (2012) draws upon John McMurtry's work to describe life-value as entailing those facilities we need to „maintain and develop life and its sentient, cognitive, imaginative, and creative-practical capacities" (Noonan, 2012, p. 8). When instilled with an eco-sensitive ethic, arenas of life-value creation are potentially radical for organising. But organising is assumed to be a task for managerial and technocratic elites – even though powerful elites have misused their privileged access to organising to breach planetary limits. We need a new imaginary of all people as makers of organisations, who are equipped with a human capability for ethical organising.

Eco-sensitive meaning systems recognise *more-than-human development* in how our flourishing is implicated in the flourishing of other living beings and natural ecosystems. They foster an orientation of care whereby we become willing to be the means through which these other beings and things flourish, thereby generating new sources of life and work meaning that can be taken up into public meaning-making and cultivate the shift to a social character orientation rooted in moral attention. Applying Fromm's (1976) distinction between the „mode of being" and the „mode of having": In the mode of being, we come to see ourselves as responsible for cultivating connections that enfold other living beings and natural ecosystems into radically inclusive social worlds. In service of planetary preservation. Puig de la Bellacasa (2017, p. 20) describes a materialist ethics of care in terms of a „force distributed across a multiplicity of agencies and materials and supports our world as a thick mesh of relational obligation". To act with care means to act responsibly using meaning-making as information that generates understanding and knowledge of worthy objects. For example, carbon mapping in supply chains involves detailed technical information of many material objects, combined with relational conditions of trust and fairness between differently situated stakeholders. This entails a new imaginary of work – the place it has in our lives and the meanings we derive from our activities. Donna Haraway's (2015) vision of the Chthulucene, for example, evokes the possibility of kin-making and co-labouring in solidarity with other beings and things. She says:

> „Maybe, but only maybe, and only with intense commitment and collaborative work and play with other terrans, flourishing for rich multispecies assemblages that include people will be possible"
> (Haraway, 2015, p. 160).

I find a materialist ethics of care to be very suggestive for how meaningfulness in future sustainable societies might be expressed in positive organisational meaning-systems. When combined with mutuality as an organising principle, meaningful work derived from such meaning sources provides people with the resources for resisting the imposition of meaning interpretations and appropriation of meaning-systems by the powerful. Meaningful work also institutes principled meaning-making, guarding against breakdowns in positive organisational and societal meaning-systems. This matters, because breakdowns can lead to distortions in ethically-oriented social cognition, resulting in poor decision-making, including: corruption of meanings, hijacking of meaning-making, failures in practical reasoning and decision making, and experiences of alienation. The pathologies and cognitive biases arising from this are well documented – wilful blindness, cognitive dissonance, group think, and much more.

The protective function of meaningful work

The protective function of meaningfulness in maintaining positive organisational meaning-systems and processes of principled meaning-making highlights underexplored aspects of meaningfulness, including truth-telling, courage, hope, and resilience. *Truth telling* is critical in collective evaluations of facts, values and meanings; *courage* helps people face up to alienation gaps, or the breaks between ideals and reality that generate dismay, anxiety and withdrawal; *hope* counters the harms arising from the potential collapse of meaning-systems; and *resilience* is a vital public good which prepares individuals, communities, and whole societies for the disruptions of adaptation, or for even more radical change when adaptation is insufficient.

Practical reasoning relies upon truth-telling, and commitment to truth-telling. In circumstances of complex change, such as sustainability transitions, principled meaning-making – when enriched by diverse

sources of meanings and governed by a life sensitive ethos – facilitates the articulation and communication of truthful perspectives in coordinative narratives. But when crises are transformative, truth-telling can break down as we struggle to express what is happening to us. In „Language and End Time", Günther Anders (2019) said of the nuclear age: „Ordinary human language was (…) not 'made' for what is *enormous*" (Anders, 2019, p. 134, trans. Müller). He asked whether it is possible for us to create a language that will help us to become fully alert to our shared predicament. To extend our attentiveness to what is essential in the crises we face, we need truth-telling narratives that will re-frame human to non-human relationships. Philosopher George Kateb (2011) argues for a concept of species dignity where human dignity is tied to earth stewardship. He says that because of our impact upon the planet, human beings have a certain kind of status, or position, whereby they have „a tremendous duty towards nature-namely, to become ever more devotedly the steward of nature" (Kateb, 2011, p. x). A new dispensation for human dignity as species dignity would tie us collectively to responsibilities of care for the earth. Responsibilities that also involve care for ourselves as valuable beings with lives of our own to lead. But the lives available for us to lead are in danger of being drastically changed by climate heating. We know this, and our sense of threat is producing negative experiences of alienation in many social and political worlds. In Origins of Totalitarianism, Hannah Arendt (1966) describes the alienated as „those for whom powerlessness has become the major experience of their lives" (Arendt, 1966, p. vii, preface), and so who can no longer make sense of the human world. She says that comprehension means „(…) examining and bearing consciously the burden which our century has placed on us – neither denying its existence nor submitting meekly to its weight. Comprehension, in short, means the unpremeditated, attentive facing up to, and resisting of, reality – whatever it may be" (Arendt, 1966, p. viii). This makes comprehending the world an act of courage: A willingness to face up to muteness, to the lack of words, and to press on with inquiring into events no matter how confusing and painful doing so may be.

As Fromm (1976) makes clear, alienation does not inevitably produce negative responses. Indeed, we can turn alienation into a tool for comprehension. Meaningful work equips us to actively seek out alienation by using principled meaning-making to interrogate our shared predicament. Such attempts at comprehension require truth-telling and courage to explore the gap between reality and ideals, to face up to the anguish of change, and find good reasons to act. Decision-making that produces good reasons depends upon hope, as a kind of faith that our actions, and the lives they produce, can be shown to make sense. But we face the potential erasure of many ways of life, the work that reproduces such ways of life, and the meaning-systems associated with them. In writing of the confinement of the native American Crow people to reservations, Jonathan Lear (2008) highlights how practical reasoning for the Crow come to an end with the collapse of their way of life. He quotes Two Leggings, who said about the loss of the buffalo: „Nothing happened after that. We just lived" (Lear, 2008, p. 3). Lear captures a „peculiar form of human vulnerability", of no more events because, with the disintegration of the meaning-systems scaffolding a particular way of life, people could no longer make their actions intelligible. Such losses are critical for anxiety and resentment that can spill over into divisive populist politics. Fromm (1976, p. 141) says that those who hope are „hardheaded realists" who „shed all illusions" and „fully appreciate the difficulties" of making the new society. At the same time, they require, he says, „the energizing attraction of a new vision" (Fromm, 1976, p. 163). So as meaning-systems disintegrate, we need radical hope – to hope even though old sources of meaning have dried up. To make resisting despair a form of collective resilience, a type of social-psychological public good that shapes organisational psychology and acts as a resource for making sense of our acting and being together. Becoming attentive to peril is painful and risky because doing so may set in train vicious cycles of negative alienation. But we can protect ourselves from negative alienation by cultivating a wealth of positive meaning-sources derived from sustainable earth-human relations. These support collective resilience as a public good, and therefore the possibility of life meaning. Repp (2018, p. 404) argues that „a meaningful life is one that is rich in perceived sign meaning". In harnessing meanings for practical reasoning, we also harness them for meaningful lives. In the end, sustainable transitions will depend upon enough of us being willing to craft self-identities consistent with the responsibilities of earth stewardship, by connecting our personal growth to multi-level systems change. This increases the demand for organisations that embody ethically-oriented social cognition.

Making organisations

As discussed, our will to form represents a general capacity to organise which can be used for good or for ill. My proposal is that we bend social cognition towards ethically viable organising when we use the moral value of meaningfulness in practical reasoning, facilitated by mutuality as an organising principle. Mary Douglas (1986) shows how we organise in

order to overcome the limits of human rationality. Organisations function as extensions of our cognition, of our thinking and feeling. Their thought worlds shape our perceptions: „Squeezing each other's ideas into a common shape" (Douglas, 1986, p. 91). From this common shape of ideas, we derive responsibilities that we put upon each other. Douglas says people make organisations to stabilise wavering commitment to collective action. „Wavering" because our desire for the benefits of joint endeavour is in tension with our desire for control and autonomy. She describes how people start and maintain organisations through interactive cycles of institution building. People get organisations going by using founding analogies to systematise knowledge and coordinate participation. These analogies are rooted in fundamental oppositions, such as man / nature; male / female. They ground conventions and habits, naturalised into legitimating principles that provide reasons for action. In this way, organisations become living machines for social cognition and decision-making. They proliferate labels and categories derived from their founding analogies. They are also well-springs of meanings, a resourceful if ambivalent inheritance for making organisations. In the process, categories make us into certain kinds of people. Douglas says that we delegate our most important decisions to the organisations we have made. But if this decision-making is not to become fossilised, ill-fitting for new challenges and crises, we must repeatedly break through the fixed patterns – the labels and categories – of our organisations, which forms their selective memory and stunted experience, or what Douglas calls their „narcissistic self-contemplation" (Douglas, 1986, p. 92). We must resist their classifying pressures. Indeed, we have always had to do so since there is no period of „unquestioned legitimacy", and „human history is studded all the way from the beginning with nails driven into local coffins of authority" (Douglas, 1986, p. 94 and p. 95).

In organisational life, our shared cognitive and emotional framings are shot through with oppositions and tensions that are hardwired into every organisation because of their reliance upon founding analogies. Douglas says: „At the one point near to the top of any organisation, the structure is based ultimately on balanced opposition, as at the summit of national or international systems. But if there are no coordinating institutions or other more complex orderings, a stalemate of hostile forces will be the most significant collective achievement at that level" (Douglas, 1986, p. 57). Oppositional dead ends, such as those arising from sustainability / resiliency tensions, can produce vicious cycles of corporate alienation, visited upon one generation of members after another. But positive responses can be encouraged if we use the tools of meaningfulness to break into these vicious cycles. Not looking away from experiences of alienation, but forming organisational procedures that track the hidden oppositions by which any particular organisation is held together. Principled meaning-making helps members map founding analogies, question legitimizing principles and reformulate „cognitive devices" (Douglas, 1986, p. 55) in the organisation's thought world. Founding analogies scatter meanings, both positive and negative, throughout the structures and culture of every organisation. Douglas describes these as: „Like so much bric-a-brac, these proto-theoretical pieces lie around, ready to be pressed into service, to promote the thinker's deepest social concerns" (Douglas, 1986, p. 66). They provide ethical resources for people to initiate new cycles of institution building. But some of the materials lurking in the recesses of every organisation are undesirable such as: „Belief in a malign and unjust cosmos with evil humans in their midst" (Douglas, 1986, p. 41). These are immanent potentials of anti-life. Multi-level meaningfulness provides critical tools for countering anti-life, alerting members when divisive remnants of foundation emerge in public meaning-making, and presenting meaning-makers with a method of exploratory inquiry for unearthing positive meaning sources.

Corporate alienation

Corporate alienation is a particularly powerful signal of an organisation that has become separated from its potential for life-value creation. Such alienation is not just a psychological rupture, it is a distortion of social structures and relationships. By de-sensitising organisational members to how their activities impact the well-being and flourishing of valuable beings and things, corporate alienation renders people vulnerable to attempts by the powerful to subvert and appropriate meaning-making processes. It can derive from what Stephen White (2017) describes as an interior malignancy, which is „systematically invasive, not directly willed by anyone, and may be lethal to its host" (White, 2017, p. 132). As a type of corrupted organisational logic, systemic malignancy is maintained by failures in ethically-oriented social cognition. The result is a disintegration of meaningfulness, a sense of dearth or „brute insufficiency of meaning" (White, 2017, p. 94) that corrupts principled meaning-making and poisons meaning-sources, rendering organisational members voiceless and mute, and resulting in severe threats to their collective and personal identities.

The opposite of interior malignancy is corporate commitment to life-value creation. This entails being open to changes in our collective motivational

structures, as well as facing up to dilemmas regarding what must change and what must stay the same. The experience of change can be profoundly alienating: the objects we value, with which we are materially and emotionally intertwined, may become unrecognisable to us. Too monstrously transformed for us to be able to appropriate them to the meaning content of our lives. We can force objects (beings and things) which matter to us to change so that we ourselves might remain unchanged. Or we reject them, if they change to preserve their own being in ways we find unacceptable. Rather than fitting valuable objects to our needs, Fromm (1976, p. 71) suggest that we should make ourselves available to them in a „process of mutual alive relatedness". A process where we become willing to change ourselves for their sake.

To navigate sustainability transitions, we need to cultivate in ourselves and each other a readiness towards mutual change that enriches both parties. This is difficult when social cognition remains dominated by the „mode of having", resulting in vicious cycles of alienation at multiple levels of organising from communities to institutions, cities, and nations. In a recent paper examining diverse manifestations of alienation, Silver (2019) brings together Marx's integration/separation with Simmel's growth/ossification, or „alienation as separation and disintegration with alienation as the loss of vitality and creativity" (Silver, 2019, p. 7). For Simmel, alienation is an unavoidable aspect of the human condition – as we reach out to objects in striving for growth, or „more life", we can experience those objects as closed off (cf. Silver, 2019). When objects resist our efforts to relate, we can feel cast adrift, unmoored, and rootless. Hartmut Rosa describes a non-alienated form of life as one that is „rich in multi-dimensional experiences of 'resonance'" (Rosa, 2010, p. 101). Resonance is a type of knowing and attending to another through encounters that engenders a feeling of being „called upon by something different that transforms me" (Lijster & Celikates, 2019, p. 74). Such transformative encounters have „the power to break with given institutional or interpretive frames" (Rosa, 2020, p. 397). We can respond positively to such calls, especially when they take place in action contexts structured by the moral value of meaningfulness, and therefore protected by truth-telling, hope, courage, and collective resilience. When we become willing to be influenced by the other, we allow their presence to shape our cognition and provide purposes for our collective action, thereby turning moments of negative alienation into positive experiences of inquiry. This implies a readiness to stay with the discomfort of alienation, together with a willingness to make ourselves into the means for life-value creation.

The features of collective moral agency

What kinds of organisations might break into vicious cycles of alienation and be productive of ethically-oriented social cognition? In their book on group agency, List and Pettit (2011) argue that organisations must be made fit to be held responsible, and that this requires organisations to become collective *moral* agents. Organisations which are collective moral agents design procedures enabling their members to face up to vicious cycles of corporate alienation by providing them with opportunities to „interact with it, criticize it, and make demands on it, in a manner not possible with a non-agential system" (List & Pettit, 2011, p. 5). This sets up a social bond between members of the organisation who care about its integrity and moral status in society. Such a view retrieves the organisation as an ethical entity, as itself a potentially worthy object, that matters, and towards which members have responsibilities as moral agents of construction. This runs counter to recent theorising of the organisation in which the organisation as an entity disappears (Besio, Du Gay & Serrano Velarde, 2020) into networks, platforms, or other ephemeral types of organising. I suggest that organisational entities which are worthy of our contributions possess two identifying features of collective moral agency: Integrity and empathy. The first, *organisational integrity*, is the organisation's independent moral presence in society. Integrity is manifested when the organisation refuses to allow people and assets to be used for morally objectionable purposes. The second feature is *organisational empathy*, where organisations develop the capability to cultivate empathetic orientations and feelings in their members, equipping them to judge whether organisational responses are „morally worthy organisational emotions" (Collins, 2018, p. 827).

In the end, to make organisations that support the shift to a social character orientation rooted in moral attention, we need a system of democracy covering our associational life across all fields of endeavour. Fromm (1976) says our future as a species will depend upon „how many brilliant, learned, disciplined, and caring men and women are attracted by the new challenge to the human mind, and by the fact that this time *the goal is not control over nature, but control over technique and over irrational social forces and institutions that threaten the survival of Western society, if not the human race*" (Fromm, 1976, p. 142-143). This seems about right, except that this time we need, not the brilliance of a cadre of philosopher Kings and Queens, but the capabilities of all persons, and even other living beings and things, to create meanings for practical reasoning. This demands a fresh democratic dispensation. A radical inclusion of life into more-than-life, into democracy as a way of life, and a platform for

societal progress and people-making. Democracy as a total learning system that releases new life and work meanings out of our relatedness to other beings and doings, producing meaning-systems to underpin the social and cultural psychology needed for establishing a planetary web of ecological civilisations.

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Correspondence to:
Dr. Ruth Yeoman
Kellogg College
60-62 Banbury Road
Oxford, OX2 6PN
United Kingdom
ruth.yeoman@kellogg.ox.ac.uk