

RECONSTRUCTING THE IMAGE OF THE CLEANER

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Abstract

Purpose: The article shows the relevance of an insider's perspective on workers in the cleaning industry (cleaners). It explains how the ways in which cleaners create meaning in their work can be explored. These findings help to create added value for FM.

Theory: Organisational theory describes a paradigm shift towards positivity. This shift implies an insider's perspective. Self-determination theory and the theory of lived spirituality help to understand this reconstruction of the image of the cleaner.

Method: Literature review. The findings lead to the conclusion that qualitative research contributes to the create added value.

Findings: In the cleaning industry the focus on Taylor's organising imperatives is no longer desirable. The industry lacks flexibility and risks crossing moral borders. Focus on meaning in work may contribute to better performance and help the industry adapt to new trends like flexible workspaces, hospitality and sustainability.

Originality: The focus on cleaners and the use of self-determination theory and spirituality theory.

Keywords: Facility Management, cleaning, meaning, self-determination, spirituality, qualitative research

Introduction

At the end of the closing ceremony of the 2012 Olympics in London, football legend Pele appeared on stage. Since the 2016 Olympics will be held in Brazil, Pele took of his coat and showed the famous yellow shirt worn by the Brazil national team. He was assisted by a man wearing orange fluorescent clothing. It was Rio's most well-known street-sweeper, Renato Sorriso. Back home, in Rio, the street-sweeper has status. A colleague of Sorriso described his profession as follows: "I think I have a real job. Like a nurse, engineer, technician or a great intellectual. I am the street-sweeper who cleans my city" (website Koningshuis).

A year earlier, in the Netherlands Dutch politician Bolkestein commented on the strikes in the Dutch cleaning industry as follows: "There are also people who [...] get opportunities but don't seize them and then descend the social ladder and have to stay alive by cleaning office buildings" (website Vara).

The contrast is clear. Is a cleaner someone who can be proud of his/her work or is the work (in most cases) a sign of failure? The answer to this question is of course relevant: from the perspective of the cleaner's well-being and from an organisational point-of-view. After all, the experience of pride leads to better performance at work. Service-oriented organisations need people like Sorriso.

Facility Management (FM) is a relatively young discipline that is evolving and that is in the process of self-definition. Its environment is dynamic as organisations feel the need to cut costs and FM is faced with trends such as flexible workspaces, hospitality and sustainability. Still, FM tries to change its focus from cost reduction to value creation. FM should not be all about operating as efficiently and as inexpensively as possible, but much more about creating added value for businesses (Drion et al., 2012). Furthermore "FM value is relationship value", (Jensen et al., 2012), which means that this added value is created in a network of stakeholders such as clients, customers, users, suppliers and employees. Since FM operates in and with organisations that function more and more as open systems (Schoemaker et al., 2006; Karakas, 2009), interaction with these stakeholders increases and becomes more complex. Hence transparency in this cooperation has become more important. Creating added value means increased dependence on human capital in organisations and knowing the people you work for and with.

One of FM's most important and (as we will see in section 4) unknown stakeholders is the cleaner. In total, just over 164,000 people are employed the Dutch cleaning industry and the FM sector spends 4 billion euros on cleaning services (12.6 % of FM's total spending ex. CREM). The cleaning industry is an important stakeholder because 95% of the facility managers work with cleaners (Bekker et al., 2012) and the outsourcing rate is 85%. (Spil et al., 2012).

Cleaning is characterised as a commodity and the market is competitive. Hence cost reduction and efficiency (inspired by the principles of Taylor) determine the market. As a result cleaners get less time to clean, the supply of cleaning materials is limited and the cleaning frequencies are lowered. This paper argues that the unilateral focus on reducing costs has had its best time. It provides two arguments (organisational and moral) for a different view on organising the cleaning services. In contrast to a Taylorist approach that advocates a strict distinction between manager and worker, this article proposes a perspective that dwells on the ways in which workers themselves experience their work. This leads to the following research question:

"In which ways do cleaners create meaning in their work?"

The article describes the relevance of this question and in the end examines how this question can be answered.

The structure of this paper is as follows. In the first part, Taylor's principles of organisation are discussed. This part recognizes two possible caveats. The second part describes a paradigm shift to a more inclusive approach of organisation. The self-determination theory (SDT) and the theory of lived spirituality also are discussed. The third part illustrates that this shift is relevant in the context of FM. The fourth and last part starts with the proposition that an insider's perspective is essential. It then describes how qualitative research can reconstruct the image of the cleaner.

Organising efficiency: Taylor's scientific management

In his book *Images of Organizations* (1997), Morgan describes how the famous military innovator Frederick the Great was fascinated by mechanical toys. This fascination undoubtedly inspired Frederick when he transformed his army into an efficient and reliable unity. Innovations like ranks and uniforms, military language, hierarchy, rules and the principle that a soldier should have more fear for his commander than for the enemy, are now taken for granted. These innovations changed the army he had inherited - an 'unruly mob' - into a disciplined unit that undoubtedly resembled an army of toy soldiers.

This Frederick the Great in turn fascinated another Frederick (Taylor) who, in a time of increasing organisation and mechanisation of society, searched for the best way to organise. He eventually developed his method of scientific management which consists of five key principles (Morgan, 1997):

- Shift all responsibility for the organisation of work from the worker to the manager.
- Use scientific methods to determine the most efficient way of doing work.
- Select the best person to do the work thus designed.
- Train the worker to do the work efficiently.
- Monitor the worker to make sure procedures are followed and thus results are achieved.

Taylor's method has had a huge impact on modern organisations. Thinking in pre-determined goals and carefully planning and continuously monitoring and adjusting the steps to achieving them have undoubtedly contributed to the success of many organisations. History however has shown that Taylor's method also has downsides. The first type of disadvantage has an organisational nature and has to do with a lack of flexibility of organisations that focus on efficiency. The second argument is moral and deals with the dehumanising aspects of organisations.

A lack of flexibility

Environments become dynamic when demand becomes unpredictable due to demographic, economic, social, technical, ecological or political (DESTEP) developments or due to increasing competition. Under these circumstances organisations need flexibility in order to adapt. Organisations that rely too much on Taylorist principles tend to lack this. After all, the environment requires the adjustment of goals, which is not easy because this implies changing all the processes.

Furthermore, organisations that focus on routine, tend to lack the talent for creativity and innovation. Change is therefore not only difficult due to fixed and imposed structures, change is also not a ‘natural’ option. The lack of creativity and innovativeness is related to the fact that according to Taylorist principles workers do not have to think: “[...] the fact that mechanistic definitions of job responsibilities encourage many organisations to adopt mindless, unquestioning attitudes” (Morgan, 1997).

Dehumanisation in organisations

Organisations that are designed according to Taylor’s principles tend to be confronted with the limits of what is morally acceptable. Research on work motivation for example, points out the inability to act from a sense of autonomy (“I experience that what I do has importance”) has adverse effects on the mental health and well-being of people (Deci and Ryan, 2008). Organisations also systematically create distance between people (social distance) and between the actions and their consequences (Ten Bos, 2003). Like Frederick the Great told his generals to leave the battlefield, Frederick Taylor banned the manager from the workplace. Hence both became unable to see the consequences of their decisions and in a way lost sight of reality.

A paradigm shift towards positivity

Since Taylor, theory and practice have evolved in ways that acknowledge the human factor in organisations. These ways, however, still approach the human factor in an instrumental way, as a resource to achieve defined goals (Schoemaker et al., 2006). The last few decades both theory and practice of organisation and management have shown a growing awareness of a paradigm shift. This shift acknowledges the increasing complexity of organisations and their environment and hence focuses on the human factor which has to live up to the challenges this complexity implies. It is therefore interested in the ways in which this human factor can reach its full potential. This paradigm is characterised by positivity: “creating organizational contexts that enable human strengths and unlock positive and generative dynamics of vibrant human communities” (Karakas, 2011).

Unlike the Taylorist paradigm, this new paradigm seeks to employ full human potential and acknowledges that an employee is more than a worker. An employee has needs, a heart and spirit, a family and a personal life, all of which should be taken into consideration when creating the organisational context. This perspective on work denies Taylor's first principle of shifting all responsibility for the way the work is done to the manager. Instead human potential itself and the intention to use it to create value in a human community based on shared values, become essential.

By offering a context in which people can employ their full human potential, organisations benefit from an increase in productivity, creativity and a reduction in absenteeism. A classic win-win situation: "these [...] new ways of working aim to be mind-enriching, heart-fulfilling, and spirit-growing for employees, and still be financially rewarding at the same time" (Karakas, 2009).

While Taylorist organising risks to dehumanise workers, this new paradigm explicitly acknowledges the human potential of workers as a key ingredient for success. The increase in productivity and creativity suggests that this focus leads to greater flexibility in organisations. Hence both downsides of Taylorist thinking are now positive aspects of a business model. The following two theories agree with this win-win relation and provide a framework in which this can be understood. They both claim meaning is an essential aspect for unlocking the potentials of human functioning.

Self-determination theory

The self-determination theory (SDT) is a motivation theory which states that not only the amount of motivation, but also the type of motivation determines the quality of human action. SDT differentiates between controlled motivation and autonomous motivation. The first has an external locus of control, the latter has an internal locus of control (Deci and Ryan, 2000). Various experiments show that autonomous motivation leads to more optimal functioning and to more health and well-being. SDT therefore shows how organisational success can converge with positive effects on employees. "This means that factors that support high-quality motivation also support the worker's self, which is an important win-win situation for managers" (Deci and Ryan, 2008).

Organisations would do well to discover how autonomous motivation can be achieved. The experience of meaning is crucial. In order to be autonomously motivated an individual has to think of his actions as meaningful. This means that the individual must be able to integrate the rationale of his actions into a unified sense of self.

SDT considers the need for autonomy to be a basic (innate) psychological need. SDT states that people also have innate needs for relatedness and competence. This implies that the ex-

perience of being part of a social context and the experience of being challenged contribute to autonomous motivation.

The theory of Lived Spirituality

Workplace spirituality is concerned with questions on how the spirit (“inner life”) of people is nourished by the work they do (Ashmos and Duchon, 2000). Studies in this field support the existence of a positive relation between human well-being and organisational success. Research suggests that the experience of spiritual meaning leads to an “increase of morale, commitment and productivity” and “decrease of stress, burnout and workaholism” and contributes to the welfare of employees. Moreover, it provides a sense of belonging and loyalty to the organisation (Karakas, 2009).

Meaning is again of importance, but on another level. Contrary to the SDT point-of-view in which meaning has to do with coherence to a unified sense of self, the theory of Lived Spirituality considers meaning as a result of coherence between the self to something outside of the self. For meaning to be spiritual there needs to be an external referent. This ‘could-be’ reality can be an ideal, a dream, a (religious) belief, or the perspective of one’s total life and invites the actual self to transcend towards it (Van den Hoogen, 2010).

This ‘spiritual activity’ is not strictly reserved for a spiritual moment in everyday life (for instance during set times for prayer or during a retreat) but can be observed as a phenomenon in all of life domains. Spirituality therefore is lived by people, possibly also in the context of one’s work.

Cleaning services, the need for an insider’s perspective

In creating added value the facility manager and cleaner share a common goal. However the Dutch documentary ‘Schoonmaakwoede’ (Cleaning Anger) gives a striking picture of the ways in which cleaning services are organised.

The documentary shows that in procurement cleaning is mainly used to master budgets and therefore pricing is decisive. In reaction suppliers of cleaning services solely focus on the lowest price. As a result the market is dominated by efficiency. Efficiency is achieved by applying Taylor’s principles in a correct way. Management sets goals and decides how the goals are to be achieved, the work is organised, and how workers are trained and monitored. However, when goals are unrealistic, the ways in which work is organised, workers are trained and monitored become unrealistic as well. Eventually, it is impossible for cleaners to meet the demands of their managers and it has become impossible to create value for the customer and user. The fact that a cleaner has to clean up to 600 m² per hour exemplifies how Taylorist thinking has gone ad absurdum. Clearly, efficiency is not the way to adapt to the changing demands of suppliers.

The documentary also shows how the cleaner is dehumanised: s/he is frustrated and dissatisfied because of the impossible demands and has to work under improper circumstances. Eventually this led to The Netherlands' biggest strike since 1933. For nine weeks cleaners in the country laid down their work and introduced respect as one of their major demands: respect for the cleaner as a person who does an important job. The demand for respect also implied an argument for cleaning during office hours. The cleaner as a person that belongs to the organisation and whose work and face have a right to be seen.

In order to create added value in dynamic and competitive markets, organisations need to be flexible and managers need the potential of their employees. The distant perspective that Taylor suggested does not offer managers clues on how they can use the ideas, loyalty and flexibility of his workers. An insider's perspective however, does.

Reconstructing the image of the cleaner

This insider's perspective is one of the basic characteristics of qualitative research. Qualitative methodologies help explore the ways in which FM can create added value (Waldburger and Nielsen, 2012). This type of research is interested in reality as it is constructed by individuals: "qualitative research generally starts with the assumptions that individuals have an active role in the construction of social reality and that research methods that can capture this process of social construction are required" (Boeije, 2010). The reason for the focus on the construction of reality is the assumption that reality itself cannot be an object of knowledge, because as humans we cannot observe and know it. Individuals therefore construct reality and are confronted with reality as it is interpreted by others.

Similarly there is no objective knowledge that can be used to organise cleaning services in the best way possible. When it comes to the question: *what is cleaning?*, there is no truth, but there is an interpretation of cleaning as a meaningful (or non-meaningful) part of a (daily) life. The analyses ('verstehen') of these interpretations can help organise cleaning in ways that meet the demands of both businesses and cleaners, as the paradigm of positivity suggests. Unfortunately, there's little knowledge on these interpretations.

In order to construct these interpretations the researcher has to take an insider's perspective. This is often referred to as role-taking. Role-taking is achieved by using a qualitative survey consisting of in-depth interviews. In these interviews the ways in which individuals (i.e. cleaners) give meaning to their work are explored carefully and in detail. The following questions could be the starting point for in-depth interviews:

- The past: how did you become a cleaner?
- The present: which three moments during your career as a cleaner would you like to share with me?
- The future: how do you see your future?

Role taking can also be achieved by a method called shadowing. While shadowing, the researcher follows an individual over a certain period of time. By doing so, the researcher has direct access to the context in which reality is created and by asking comments s/he can simultaneously gain insight in opinions and behaviour of individuals (McDonald, 2005; Klungseth, 2012). Shadowing can be used supplementary to in-depth interviewing to induce constructions of meaning in cleaning.

Already during data collection the researcher starts analysing the constructions. In this process of deconstruction the researcher searches for patterns while continuously checking these with new data from the interviews and shadowing. Eventually a reconstruction is made, a coherent theory that is based on the narratives, behaviour and experiences of the respondents. This reconstruction explains how cleaners create meaning in their work. This reconstruction is confronted with known theory: SDT and LS. With the help of these theories the researcher gains insights into how the work facilitates or thwarts the satisfaction of needs for competence, relatedness and autonomy and in the cleaner's motivational process (SDT). Furthermore LS helps understanding the reconstruction as a means of finding spiritual meaning in work.

Conclusion

The paradigm shift towards a more inclusive approach of organisation offers opportunities to the facility manager who wants to create added value. This approach supports the idea that business and personal interests can be mutually reinforcing.

Until now thinking in terms of efficiency and reducing costs have been dominant in cleaning. This line of thinking has gone too far and has created an image of a cleaner that fits perfectly in Taylor's picture: an individual that does pre-designed work that is poorly (not-autonomously) motivated. Despite this picture, we can still imagine that a cleaner who finds meaning in her/his work is a better cleaner than one who doesn't. For FM this image is worth exploring. In times of economic downturn and confronted with trends like flexible workspaces and hospitality FM needs smarter, more flexible and more service-oriented ways of organising the creation of added value. The reconstruction of the image of the cleaner is a step towards a more sustainable future of FM.

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