THESIS SUMMARY

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The Meaning of Work and the
Individual's Sensemaking – From the Perspective of Human Resource Managers

Supervisor: Dr. Gyula Bakacsi

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I. Research Background and Justifying the Topic

What is the meaning of work? Most of us never really consciously consider this question. Yet it is worth examining because the meaning of work does influence several factors of interest not just to us, but also to company managers. It impacts the extent to which the individual is satisfied with their work; how much stress the individual encounters while performing their job; the individual's physical and psychological health; the degree of motivation the individual feels; performance; and the extent to which the individual feels a connection to their workplace and to their job.

I.1. The Significance of the Research Topic

According to the results of scientific research, the meaning that the individual attaches to their work impacts the following factors:

- the individual's satisfaction (Wrzesniewski et al, 1997; Wishner, 1991; Brown, 2001; Roberson, 1990);
- the stress the individual encounters while working (Locke – Taylor, 1990; Simon, 1997; Isaksen, 2000; Berte, 1989);
- the individual's physical and mental health (Baumeister, 1991; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997);
- the individual's motivation or performance (Roberson, 1990; Shamir, 1991);
- the individual's sense of belonging (Ashforth – Pratt, 2003; Pratt, 1998; Jaeger, 1994).

The most often underscored result of meaningful work is that the individual becomes satisfied with their job (Roberson, 1990). A decade ago, nearly fifty percent of American employees said that they were not satisfied with their jobs (Pratt–Ashforth, 2003). The significance of meaningful work was recently further underscored by a survey of 5000 German employees. Ninety-two percent of the individuals polled in this representative survey mentioned in first place that the most important factor, as far as satisfaction is concerned, is the feeling that they are doing something meaningful in the workplace. The survey was conducted by the German magazine *Young Nurse* (I/1). It does seem timely, then, to conduct a study examining the meaningfulness and meaning of work.

Researchers examining the meaning of work still have much to discover about the meaning work carries in people's lives and what influences this meaning (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). This is an interesting question also because, according to research findings, individuals working in the same job may attach different meanings to their jobs (Wrzesniewski et al, 1997). The model of social information processing (Salancik—Pfeffer, 1978) has called our attention to the fact that the individual's approach to their work is greatly colored by the social environment in which they perform their activity. Precisely how this social environment – including coworkers and managers – impacts one's understanding of their jobs is not yet entirely clear (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003).

The meaning and meaningfulness of work, and the evolution of these factors, is an issue important both for the individuals as well as for their organizations. From the perspective of the individual: if the employee is provided a broader perspective on the meaning and meaningfulness of their work, this understanding in itself allows them to improve their own situation and to transform it in their own favor. For the organization, this is important primarily in terms of employee retention and increasing employee satisfaction, commitment and motivation (Roberson, 1990). The more favorable conditions organizations are able to create for their employees – conditions which allow for meaningful work –, the more the company's performance may improve. Pratt and Ashforth (2003) point out that creating meaningful working conditions is not just a means for organizations, but may be a goal in itself.

I.2. Research Foundations, Research Goals and Questions

The scope of research examining the meaning and meaningfulness of work is rather broad; I therefore believe it is necessary to first provide an overview of research approaches before describing my own approach. Depending on the definition of the concept of the meaning of work they used, researchers took various approaches. According to one group of researchers, the meaning of work and the meaningfulness of work is necessarily a subjective matter, with the meaning of work defined intrinsically (coming from the individual) (e.g. Simon, 1997; Isaksen, 2000). Another group of researchers believe that the meaning of work and the meaningfulness of work may be determined according to a set of objective criteria – so it is, therefore, objective (e.g. Morse – Weiss, 1955; Vecchio, 1980; MOW International Research Team, 1987). A third group of researchers emphasize the concept of intersubjectivity: that the social surroundings of the individual affect the meaning of work; the interpretation of this community impacts their individual understanding (Salancik – Pfeffer, 1978; Wrzesniewski – Dutton, 2001, Pratt – Ashforth, 2003; Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). The meaning of work can be understood as a constant, static definition at any particular moment (e.g. Morse – Weiss, 1955; Vecchio, 1980; MOW International Research Team, 1987; Isaksen, 2000) or as a variable, dynamic definition (Pratt – Ashforth, 2003; Wrzesniewski et al, 2003), with the latter lending itself to an approach focused on the process.

In my own approach, I accept the approach of intersubjectivity. I therefore find it prudent to examine the meaning of work on the level of the individual, while considering the effects of a particular community on the individual's understanding. In my opinion, the meaning of work is different not just in every society – but it is different from person to person. Just what one considers work, and what meaning they attach to it, depends on the individual. At the same time, I believe the sensemaking of work is also shaped by the meaning accepted by society, the organization or the community around them (Pratt – Ashforth, 2003).

In my research, to understand the change of meanings formulated by individuals, I had the following **assumptions** as far as the concept of the meaning of work is concerned:
- Meaning is an individual's interpretation applied to events in the individual's surroundings; it is subjective. This is a different approach from studies which considered the meaning and

meaningfulness of work to be objective, i.e. analyzing these using sets of objective criteria (e.g. Morse – Weiss, 1955; Vecchio, 1980; MOW International Research Team, 1987).

- Meaning changes, depends on a situation and is not constant: in this, it is related to the concept of sensemaking. The individual evaluates their work continuously and relates to their job based on the meaning and meaningfulness they attach to their experiences on the job.
- The social surroundings and the environment of the individual affect the meaning of work. The individual's interpretation of the meaning of work is affected by their social environment: their interpretation of the meaning of work affects the individual's understanding of it (Salancik – Pfeffer, 1978; Wrzesniewski – Dutton, 2001, Pratt – Ashforth, 2003; Wrzesniewski et al., 2003).

My approach reflects a distinct **organization theory assumption**, which I believe is important to make readers aware of. In my view, the individual's cognitive processes and norms or social stimuli affecting it are at the center of the process of sensemaking – this is the core issue studied by social constructivist theory. The primary focus of social constructivist research is how individuals construe the world mentally, through categories provided by their social relations. These studies follow the work of Vygotsky (1981) and Bruner (1990) (Fletcher, 2006; Young – Collin, 2004). They primarily examine the subjective knowledge of the individual, their cognitive processes and thoughts, as well as the social surroundings or environment in which the individual is active (Fletcher, 2006). How individuals construe meaning how do they coming to know is an important question. These processes play out primarily within the individual, who integrates new knowledge into already existing schemas or modifies existing schemas as appropriate (Young – Collin, 2004).

Following a review of my research perspectives, I will offer a brief overview of the goals I hoped to realize through my research, as well as of the questions I was seeking answers to. My **research goal** is to explore the meaning work carries for human resources managers, and how this meaning is influenced by their social environment. Through that, I hoped to obtain a deeper understanding of HR work, the meaning of work, changes to the meaning of work and of the process of sensemaking. Through my research, I hope to join the international discourse focused on the meaning of work, and I also hope to reach Hungarian HR managers. My longer term goal with this project, and through related dialogue, is to contribute to the personal development of my interview subjects and the development of their organizations.

When planning my research, I formulated the following **research questions**:

- How does the individual view their work, and how does this change when the individual encounters a surprising situation?
- What meaning do participating individuals attach to their work? How does this meaning change?

Both questions were aimed at examining the meaning of work, including both a content-based analysis of the meaning of work as well as the examination of the change process in meaning. I developed the following sub-**questions** based on the two questions above; these are obviously closely interlinked:

Content-based analysis:

- Did the meaning or meaningfulness of work change in the case of the interview subjects?
- To what extent did the meaning change?
- What patterns of meaning change did we encounter?

Process-based analysis:
- How did the meaning and meaningfulness of work change: what processes and steps led to the change in meaning?
- What factors influenced the change in the meaning of work?

The Meaning of Work – Examining the Content

In order to answer my research questions related to the content, I looked for a focus using the approach of sensemaking, leading me to the concept of the schema. When drafting my research proposal, the concept of the schema was the contentual focus of my research; yet when analyzing the empirical data, I encountered several dilemmas which led me to expand the contentual focus of my research. In my research, I examined the meaning of work from three perspectives: work-orientation, work-meaning mechanisms and meaning of work schemas.

The Meaning of Work – Examining the Process

To answer my research questions related to the process, I used the approach of sensemaking as my point of departure. I relied on the following definition of the **process of sensemaking**: to attach significance, as a result of surprise, to some kind of social cue (e.g. others' actions or comments) by placing it into an existing or emerging cognitive framework, this is followed by a reaction to the cue (based on Starbuck – Milliken, 1988; Goleman, 1985; Pratt – Ashforth, 2003; Louis, 1980a,b).

I.3. Justifying the Subject

Following a review of the literature of the meaning of work, I found that only one single study had examined the subjective interpretation of the meaning of work, the impact the social environment plays in this and the change of work meaning as a whole: this is known as the interpersonal sensemaking model of work meaning (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). I found one model which focused on the process of the change of meaning: the model of job crafting. I have also identified further studies during my review – these agreed with the change of work meaning (Locke – Taylor, 1990; Salancik – Pfeffer, 1978; Rosso et al., 2010 summary), but did not examine the process. The model of social information processing underscored the impact of the workplace environment (Salancik – Pfeffer, 1978), and also served as the foundations of two additional models: the model of job crafting and the interpersonal sensemaking model of work meaning.

In my own research, in addition to the change process, I paid special attention to examining patterns which may be detected in the process of meaning change. The authors identified patterns in the process of meaning change in the model of job crafting. They, however, primarily identified the changes in

meaning initiated through the individual's own motivation, which covered whatever job the individual was holding at the time. In my own research, I examined changes which came about as a result of some critical event. I paid special attention to the examination of the impact the workplace environment, and my research covered a broad range of the individual's relation to work in addition to their specific job (e.g. work as a life-domain). In sum: I have not found a single study which would have examined both the alteration of the content of meaning and the change process, while also emphasizing the impact the individual's social environment has – thus, from this perspective, my research represents new findings.

It is my hope that my work will contribute to a further understanding of the change of the meaning of work: by conducting my research in a different context (looking at critical events), I may be able to spotlight new aspects of this alteration. As the summary above shows, there are two studies related to the field of the change of work meaning which I consider points of departure for my own research: these were authored by Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) and by Wrzesniewski et al. (2003). I believe it is worthwhile to examine, in connection with these two studies, what theoretical contributions I expect my own research to provide. Both of these studies focused primarily on examining the change of work meaning as a process; they were less detailed in the contentual questions of the meaning of work. In the study dealing with the phenomenon of the job crafting we see examples for linking the process and content questions (p. 182). In the model of interpersonal sensemaking model of work meaning, the authors used the identification of job-role-self to incorporate contentual questions in their model; they did not explore, however, the contentual patterns of the meaning of work and the job-role-self. My research allows for an exploration of contentual patterns from several perspectives (mechanisms, orientations and schemas) as well as the identification of the process. I expect my research to provide information on the change of work meaning as far as new, previously unidentified further attributes are concerned: the extent of the change and its nature – in this regard, it could prove to be novel compared to published processes examining the change of the meaning of work.

II. Research Methodology

When describing the implementation of my research, I rely on the interactive model of qualitative research design of Maxwell's (1996). The reason I chose to do so is that during my research, my understanding of the phenomena examined changed, leading to a change of my research question, the conceptual environment I am in and the methodology applied. These interactive dynamics, which Maxwell's model so aptly describe, are a unique feature of qualitative research. I will structure the various chapters accordingly.

II.1. Methodological Background

In accordance with my research goals and research questions, my research is structured primarily around **qualitative interviews and a case-study methodology**. A case study is a piece of empirical research

which examines a particular phenomenon in its actual environment, especially in cases where the boundary between the phenomenon and the context is blurred (Yin, 2003:12-14). Case studies are preferred in qualitative methodology and may be applied with a variety of goals in mind: to construct a theory, to obtain a deeper understanding of a local context or to test a theory (Yin, 2003; Eisenhardt, 1989; Szokolszky, 2004). This is due to the fact that case studies allow for several events to be connected, as the genre takes into consideration the interaction between the individual cases as well as between the case and its context (Maaloe, 2003). Case selection indicates what the researcher finds interesting and how (through what cases) the researcher believes the research question can best be addressed. The research unit is the case itself, which may be a venue, an event, a specific behavior, an action or specific individuals (Beck-Bíró, 2009). In my own study, the **cases** are critical, memorable (pleasant or unpleasant) workplace events which affected the sensemaking of work.

In my conceptual framework, it is a specific instance of surprise that elicits the process of meaning change. I was seeking an appropriate methodological approach which was provided by **critical events** or critical incidents. Applying the approach of critical events is a novelty in research examining the meaning of work. Webster and Mertova (2007) referred to critical events which individuals were able to recall even after a long time and which contributed to a new understanding or world view on their part (p. 73). The individual does not plan, expect or control these events (Webster – Mertova, 2007). These events come as a surprise to the individual. The analysis of critical events is generally known as critical incident technique (CIT); Flanagan (1954) is credited with the scientific application of CIT. The methodology appeared in the late 1990s in qualitative social constructionist research (Chell, 2004).

II.2. Research Steps

Data Collection

To meet my research objectives – examining the meaning of work and change process of work meaning – and to explore potential background mechanisms, I chose to study **representatives of one profession**, human resources managers[1]. Human resources managers can provide an interesting **sample** because HR practices and the scientific regard of HR in general is faced with several contradictions, some of which have been accompanying HR functions since early on (Szőts-Kováts, 2006).

Following the selection of the profession to serve as my research field, the next important step was **determining the sample**. In keeping with the traditions of qualitative research, the sample was compiled using not a statistical approach, but a theoretical one; the sample is deliberately small and contextually embedded (Miles – Huberman, 1994; Bokor, 2000; Gelei, 2002). When compiling my sample I looked for variety in terms of individual character traits. I determined six traits and sought to ensure variety in them. My research was built around non-probability sampling (Babbie, 2003); one type of such sampling is the snowball method. In my research, I conducted **case-specific analysis**: I

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[1] The abbreviations HRM or HR are used for human resource management.

examined pleasant and unpleasant critical incidents and the effects these had on the meaning of work. In interviews conducted with my sample of eleven individuals I was able to identify twenty-five cases: of these, fifteen had to do with negative experiences and ten were linked to positive events.

The primary tool of data collection for my dissertation was the set of **qualitative interviews** (Kvale, 1996) which provided an opportunity to explore personal experiences related to the defining events identified by interview subjects, as well as to describe the individual's thoughts and feelings. Each interview consisted primarily of two major focus points: first, exploring the meaning work carries for the individual and secondly, collecting surprising and critical events or cases which in some way – positively or negatively – significantly affected the meaning of work as defined by the individual. Interviews were structured around a preliminary interview outline; at the same time, interviews varied widely according to the specific subject's own experiences. I conducted interviews with subjects belonging to my research sample, recording each session. I used a qualitative methodology to analyze the verbatim transcript of the recorded interviews: I looked for similar patterns and coded these, relying on the content analysis software Atlas.ti. I structured my analysis around three main questions: exploring the content of the meaning of work; identifying the change of the work meaning; looking separately at positive reinforcing processes and negative processes that lead the individual to be less certain.

Data Analysis

Data analysis incorporates three interlinked sub-processes (Huberman–Miles, 1994; Miles–Huberman, 1994): data reduction, data representation and the process of drawing and verifying conclusions. These may precede data collection, may take place concurrently or may continue following the collection of data.

Data reduction: reducing the amount of information available through selecting, on the one hand, the conceptual framework and research question and, on the other hand, the research methodology. In my research, I applied the approach of **meaning categorization** (Kvale, 1996): I grouped interview texts into categories, examining the connections and links between them. I examined the connections between various categories and codes separately in the case of each interview subject, and then I placed any corresponding categories in separate groups. I also examined the relationships between categories and groups. The various categories and groups in my research were, thus, created based on interview texts and through the relevant theories. This is how the various category-groups of orientation and mechanisms were created, together with the individual steps of the process.

Data representation: presenting the data in a structured and condensed fashion which facilitates the drawing of conclusions. Using the software Atlas.ti, I grouped the codes in various hierarchies and groups, and used a graphic representation of the relationships between closely interlinked codes to come up with a web, which I used primarily to examine relationships between orientation and mechanisms. The search function of Atlas.ti was a useful tool to that end: i.e. I was able to search for and call up the relevant texts for each code and group.

In order to understand the change process, I prepared individual **case descriptions** for each change processes, which contained quotes and a **case-level analysis** broken down by code. Processing the codes in this way facilitated the comparison of the various cases, the classification of the cases and the identification of relationships between the cases. To present a summary representation of the data, I plotted the various steps of the processes on a **summary chart**. This also depicted the relationships between the various steps. Furthermore, I prepared a **summary table** allowing for an easy comparison of the various cases. The table provides a concise overview of the data available and was of great assistance during the analytical stage.

Drawing and validating conclusions: interpreting and analyzing the data represented and condensed. The table summarizing the changes allows for a comprehensive overview of the various groups, patterns and relationships. It also provides an opportunity to identify the frequency of the various cases, to determine how many cases fall under each group (e.g. temporary or lasting change; different types of reinterpreting a situation).

I used methods of comparison and seeking out differences as a tool of analysis and of drawing conclusions during the process of analysis. I placed special emphasis on examining particularly striking and special cases: cases which, for some reason, fit in no individual group during the analysis or were impossible to group according to specific criteria.

II.3. Validity: Quality Aspects of the Research

When conducting a scientific study, it is important to ensure the quality of the research. Qualitative research schools tend to rely on criteria such as validity, reliability and generalizability, which are employed in traditional studies. At the same time, the meaning of these criteria here is different, as is the method used to achieve these goals, than in the case of traditional research studies (for more, see Gelei, 2002). The traditional approach utilizes an end-point system of control (Bokor, 2000): there is a pre-determined sample, a pre-determined measurement, pre-defined variables and scales as well as statistical sampling. At the same time, qualitative research places the emphasis on the process itself. Ensuring validity and reliability, as well as control, are present at every phase of the research (Kvale, 1996; Gelei, 2002). This practice, however, may be formalized to a much lesser extent than is the case with traditional research methods using a quantitative approach. In the following section, I will summarize what principles I adhered to when conducting my research. These helped improve the validity, reliability and generalizability of my research. I relied on the works of Miles – Huberman (1994), Huberman – Miles (1994), Kvale (1996), Maxwell (1996), Bokor (2000) and Gelei (2002) when compiling this list.

Self-reflective attention, acceptance and apperception
- Prior to examining the data obtained, I recorded my presuppositions, my emerging understanding and schemas, so that by making these explicit, I was able to look at the data in a more open manner. I was able to observe how my subjects view and understand their work and the world around them.

- I recorded my own understandings and recognitions already during the process, treating these as hypotheses and moving forward with data analysis along their lines.
- At every step of the process, I examined and recorded my dilemmas and options, and I made conscious decisions (e.g. compiling the sample, opportunities for analyzing the data).
- Tracking surprises. I encountered many surprises during my research, resulting from the exploratory methodology used. All of these were, essentially, changes affecting new conceptual frameworks and schemas.

Transparency
- My data is presented in a structured format, and with the cases elaborated, in an appendix to the dissertation. Although the cases contain raw data and plenty of quotes[2], they also depict interview subjects' opinions. This will allow the reader to look up raw data in their original context to track any level of my conclusions.
- I strove to document my research process clearly and to make it transparent. For instance: I have shown how my research focus changed, or how the concept of personal work schemas changed.
- I planned for a pilot project to make my questions and data analysis more exact. I described the findings of the pilot phase and decisions made based on that in the thesis.
- I paid special attention to, and covered in my thesis, how I handled contradictions or contradictory cases.

Triangulation
- I used a tape recorder when collecting my data. Although I did not prepare the transcripts myself, I listened to each interview and added to the transcript where necessary, while listening to the recordings. I kept a research log to record my experiences during the interviews and while examining transcripts and analyzing them. I relied, in addition to the interviews themselves, on subjects' biographic information.
- Seeking out contradictory interpretations and explanations; self-checking. I endeavored to seek out negative and contradictory cases which went against prevailing theories or my own presuppositions.
- Replicating conclusions. I looked for inconsistencies in the cases and between the cases: did the individual's self-image and values change, and were any changes temporary or lasting? By also examining values, beliefs, self-image and orientation, as well as the mechanism, I was able to view each case through several different lenses. When I encountered something through one lens, I verified it through another, using another perspective of analysis. This allowed for cross-verification so that I could examine each case from 6-8 different perspectives, making each case clearer and stripping it as much as possible of contradictions.
- I sought out my colleagues and other experts for feedback as far as my conclusions and analysis were concerned. I also sought out the opinions of several of my colleagues, cognitive experts and psychologists in connection with difficulties related to the meaning of work and when identifying or

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[2] All interview subjects agreed to the use of the cases they described in this dissertation; their names, however, have been changed.

interpreting schemas encountered in the text. I paid special attention to any contradicting opinions provided by experts.

Generalizability

- Maxwell (1996) differentiates between internal and external generalizability: in the case of the former, the conclusions drawn may be generalized only for the entire field or group, while in the case of the latter, the inferences may be valid beyond that range. In Maxwell's opinion, internal generalizability is one of the strong suits of qualitative research. Often, however, there is no reason to suppose that the conclusions drawn from a valid qualitative study would not be valid in a different context as well.

- We can differentiate between three possible levels of generalizability: (1) valid from the sample for an entire population; (2) valid from a particular practical context to the level of the theory; and (3) valid from one case examined to a next. In the case of qualitative studies, it is primarily the latter two levels which are possible. The last item is of interest primarily within the framework of the study, while theoretical generalizability is actually the real test external validity. "In this case, generalizability means that a general theoretical framework is established which may be utilized in another context as well. By doing so, these new contexts may be understood, given certain other conditions" (Bokor, 2000: p. 127).

- Thus, my research aimed at internal generalizability and, by developing the conceptual framework itself, at theoretical generalizability. I intended to rely on the following criteria to support the generalizability of my research (Bokor, 2000: p. 128):
  - A careful identification and description of the unique features of my sample, to which I devoted an entire chapter.
  - Ensuring an appropriate variance of my sample. The variance of my sample was ensured by my criteria when selecting the sample; I followed these criteria while collecting my sample. When compiling my sample, I strove to select as different subjects as possible, according to the criteria chosen (according to age, gender, type of organization, etc.).
  - Providing sufficient, detailed descriptions so that the reader may identify conditions matching their own situation. I ensure this through quotes and a detailed elaboration of the cases. I am including the cases in the appendix to my dissertation, so that the reader may verify for themselves the validity of my conclusions.
  - Matching and linking with theories developed earlier. I devoted an entire chapter to comparison with existing literature and to a discussion of new and different conclusions.
  - Providing a general description of processes and their results. This is ensured through summary chapters.
  - Making the generalizable parts of the theory explicit. This is ensured through summary chapters.

III. Research Findings

Based on my research findings, we may differentiate between two groups of critical events influencing the meaning of work: pleasant and unpleasant surprises. When processing my data, I assumed that I would encounter differences between the effects of pleasant and unpleasant surprises. I therefore relied on the two groups above and examined the effects of critical events on the meaning and meaningfulness of work. In my assumption, I relied on the model developed by George and Jones (2001), who emphasized that different cognitive activities are linked when interpreting situations eliciting positive and negative emotional reactions.

In general, I followed change processes in the discussion of my findings, separately covering contentual aspects as well. In seeking answers to my research questions, I found that they were closely interlinked and are difficult to separate: I therefore chose to present my data following the change process.

III.1. Summary Description of the Process

Each critical event commenced with some kind of event that was unexpected for the individual. Situations found to be "different" and unexpected are described in various ways by researchers dealing with the study of sensemaking (Weick – Sutcliffe – Obstfeld, 2005): contradiction, malfunction, surprise, flustering, uncertainty, opportunity or chaos. In my model, based on Louis (1980a,b) I chose to describe this "different" situation as surprise.

Critical events are always accompanied, to some extent, by tension, which is in keeping with the cognitive dissonance theory proposed by Festinger (2000/1962). George and Jones (2001) pointed to the phenomenon of cognitive dissonance in their model depicting the process of schema change. When experiencing critical events, individuals strive to reduce tension to a level that is acceptable to them and to reinforce their own positive self-image and self-esteem.

As a result of the surprise, individuals recounted how in some cases they came to question their own beliefs and expectations. Individuals generally wish to know, and find reasons for, why the unexpected situation occurred and why the expected outcome did not materialize. Several factors influenced the individuals' interpretation of the unexpected situation and what meaning they give to it: (1) status and power of the individual eliciting the surprise, (2) norms adhered to by the organization and the individual, (3) information obtained from others: observations and interpretations, (4) information obtained from others: seeking information from others.

The tension experienced by the individual tended to ease through the change of the interpretation of the situation and/or through a change in their situation serving to reinforce their self-esteem and positive self-image. Individuals shifted their interpretation of the situation in the following ways: (1) reinterpreting their job; (2) reinterpreting their tasks; (3) reinterpreting their workplace relationships; (4) reinterpreting their role; (5) reinterpreting their relationship with their profession; (6) reinterpreting their relationship to work as a life-domain; (7) reinterpreting their relationship with the organization; (8)

reinterpreting their own self-image. Each individual may have experienced one or several of these types of reinterpretations – and reinterpreting the situation was necessary in every case to ease the tension. Webster and Mertova (2007) also describe this when discussing a new understanding and a new view of the world (p. 73). One exception to this notion is the case of Balázs2, which shows that if the degree of surprise is not significant enough to lead to some kind of change, the individual is able to reduce the cognitive dissonance within a short time and does not need to reinterpret or redefine the situation to do so. This is actually typical in the lives of most people, and it is in fact reinterpreting which is considered extraordinary.

In approximately one-half of the cases, the different types of reinterpretation and the actions of the individual to realize these steps led to an easing of tension within the individual. In some of these cases, reinterpretation resulted in solutions without needing radical changes. In some cases, individuals describing an easing of tensions resorted to more radical actions to change their situation: they left the organization or switched to a different job within the same organization or at a subsidiary. In the other half of the cases, reinterpretation did not successfully bring about the necessary easing of tension, meaning that the situation still carries within it further potential changes, making it unstable.
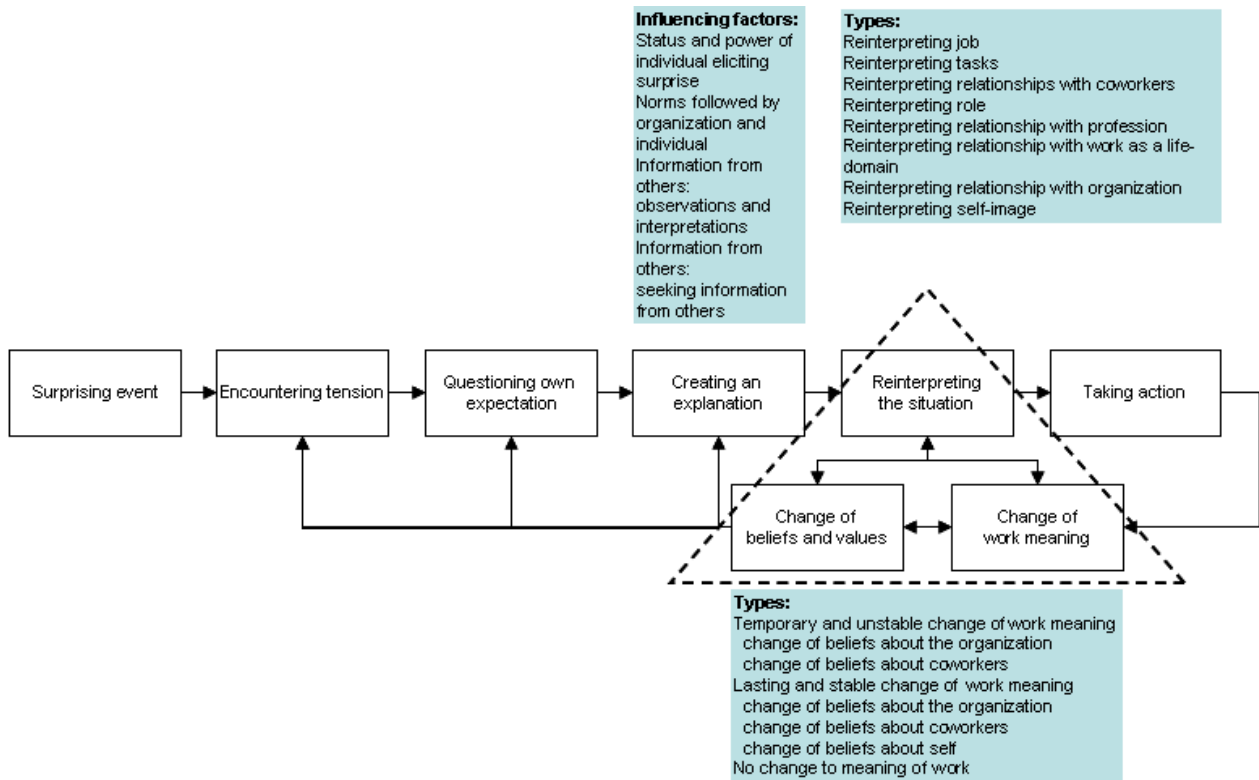
I examine the change of work meaning and the change of beliefs separately. I approached the meaning of work from two perspectives, examining the change of mechanisms and orientations in each case. The cases may be divided into two distinct groups according to the durability of the change: temporary and unstable changes vs. lasting and stable changes – these are the dividing lines between the two groups. Both groups include cases where the individual's beliefs about the organization changed and where their beliefs about coworkers changed. I was able to identify cases where the meaning of work did not change.

Pleasant surprises

Another major group of changes is that of pleasant surprises. Pleasant surprises differ from the individual's expectations in a positive way: in the majority of the cases in my research (in seven cases out of ten) they improved the individual's self-esteem and led to a change in meaning. In this paragraph, I compared primarily the effects of pleasant surprises with changes elicited by unpleasant surprises. In sum, I encountered the following differences as compared to unpleasant surprises. In positive cases, cognitive dissonance was far lower: this is evinced by the lower level of tension and by the fact that individuals were able to ease the tension more quickly. In the majority of cases (in seven cases), individuals viewed pleasant surprises as reinforcing them and shifting their own self-image in a positive direction as a result. Lasting changes were accompanied by various reinterpretations which represented all types, except the reinterpretation of work as a life-domain. As a result of positive surprises, the individuals voluntarily took on additional, new tasks and became more committed to the organization, their role and their profession. Pleasant surprises either brought about lasting change or did not lead to change; I did not encounter temporary changes. Pleasant surprises led to no changes when the individuals ignored interpretation possibilities to reinforce their self-esteem inherent in the situation.

The figure below depicts the process and the relationships between the various steps.

Figure 1: The change of work meaning as a result of critical events (author's own data)

Influencing factors:
Status and power of individual eliciting surprise
Norms followed by organization and individual
Information from others: observations and interpretations
Information from others: seeking information from others

Types:
Reinterpreting job
Reinterpreting tasks
Reinterpreting relationships with coworkers
Reinterpreting role
Reinterpreting relationship with profession
Reinterpreting relationship with work as a life-domain
Reinterpreting relationship with organization
Reinterpreting self-image

Surprising event → Encountering tension → Questioning own expectation → Creating an explanation → Reinterpreting the situation → Taking action

Change of beliefs and values ↔ Change of work meaning

Types:
Temporary and unstable change of work meaning
    change of beliefs about the organization
    change of beliefs about coworkers
Lasting and stable change of work meaning
    change of beliefs about the organization
    change of beliefs about coworkers
    change of beliefs about self
No change to meaning of work

III.2. Summarizing the Change of Work Meaning

In the previous chapter, I have reviewed the change process of work meaning and its various sub-types. In this chapter, I will compare the categories of the reinterpretation of the situation with the change of work meaning, as well as conclusions drawn from pleasant unpleasant surprises.

III.2.1. The Durability, Permanence and Extent of the Change

We may conclude that in response to surprising situations, the individual tends to reinterpret several factors related to their work and situation – and, as a result, the meaning and meaningfulness of their work also changes. They formulate a new opinion and belief of these reinterpreted factors. In the case of temporary and unstable changes, this reinterpretation and change of beliefs had to do with the individual's job, tasks, workplace relationships and their relationship with the organization. In the case

of lasting and stable changes, the individual also reinterpreted their beliefs about themselves and, at the same time, also redefined their role within the organization, or the role that their profession or work plays as an important component of their life. All of these indicate an ever-greater rethinking and major changes in the life of the individual.

Figure 2: The reinterpretation of the situation and the types of meaning of work in the various cases (author's own data)

| Change | Cases | Reinterpreting the situation | | | | | | | | Change of beliefs and values and change of work meaning | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | Temporary change of beliefs and values | | Lasting change of beliefs and values | | | | Change of work meaning | | | | No change of work meaning |
		1. Job	2. Tasks	3. Working rel. M-C	4 Role HR-O	5. Relationship with profession	6. Work as a life-domain	7. Relationship with org.	8. Self image	Beliefs about managers	Beliefs about coworkers	Beliefs about managers	Beliefs about coworkers	Beliefs about self	Values change	Mechanism change T-L	Orientation change	Significance	Self esteem	
Unpleasant surprises	Norbert1	+	+	M				+		+						T		↓	↓	
	Norbert2	+	+	M				+*	+*	+				+*	+*	L*	+*	↓	↓	
	Hajnal1	+		M				+		+						T		↓	↓	
	Szilvia1	+		C							+					T		↓	↓	
	Viktor1	+	+	C	O*						+					T		↓	↓	
	Csilla1	+	+	C	O**			+***			+					T				
	Léna2	+	+	M	HR,O			+	+			+		+	+	L	+	↑	↑	
	Bence1	+	+	M	HR,O			+	+			+		+	+	L	+	↑	↑	
	Melinda1	+	+	M	O				+			+		+	+	L	+		↑	
	Melinda2				O	+		+	+			+		+	+	L	+		↑	
	Melinda3			M	O		+	+	+			+		+	+	L	+	↑	↑	
	Rita1	+	+	C	O				+				+	+	+	L	+	↑	↑	
	Léna1	+	+	C	O				+					+	+	L	+		↑	
	Balázs1			M,C	O				+					+	+	L	+	↑	↑	
	Balázs2																			+
Pleasant surprises	Bence2	+	+		O			+	+			+		+	+	L	+	↑	↑	
	Csilla2	+	+	M	HR,O				+					+	+	L	+	↑	↑	
	Csilla3	+	+	M	HR,O				+					+	+	L	+	↑	↑	
	Mihály1				O	+			+					+	+	L	+	↑	↑	
	Mihály2				O	+			+					+	+	L	+	↑	↑	
	Viktor2				HR,O				+					+	+	L	+		↑	
	Szilvia2	+	+		O				+					+	+	L	+	↑	↑	
	Norbert3																				+
	Norbert4																				+
	Melinda4																				+

Explenation	**	temporary change
	*	ambivalence
	T	temporary
	HR	HR role
	C	coworker
	O	own role
	L	lasting
	M	manager
	↓	decrease
	↑	increase

Lasting changes only occurred if the individual reinterpreted their beliefs about themselves and the role they hold in the organization. It did not lead to lasting changes if the individual was unable to identify with their changing role (case of Viktor1), had an ambivalent relationship with the manager (case of Norbert2) and thus did not rethink their work identity or were unable to identify with it (case of Csilla1). The case of Melinda – who also reconsidered relationship with her profession and work as a life-domain – is worth looking at in greater depth. In her narrative (case of Melinda2 and Melinda3), she did not touch on a reconsideration of her role within the organization. At the same time, reconsidering her new profession and the significance of her work was accompanied by a reconsideration of her tasks, job and role, accepting a more or less radical change of these. Melinda did not discuss these aspects of the change; it is conceivable that she thought this to be self-explanatory.

In the case of temporary and unstable changes, we saw that individuals – to varying degrees – were unable to experience in their workplace mechanisms which would have imbued their work with a sense of meaning and significance. This led to a drop in the significance they attached to their work and of their self-esteem. One feature common to all temporary and unstable cases is that the cognitive dissonance continues to be present: in the narratives recounted by the individuals, this cognitive dissonance is characterized by contradictions and tension. In the case of temporary changes, the mechanisms changed, but the orientations did not. Based on all of this, we may conclude that temporary changes are indicated more precisely by the change of the mechanisms; in fact, a negative change in the mechanisms clearly indicates as much, as the figure shows. Lasting changes brought about changes in both the mechanisms as well as the orientations.

III.2.2. Self-Esteem and Significance: The Meaningfulness of Work

Among the various mechanisms, two play more prominent roles: self-esteem and significance. We have already discussed self-esteem. As a result of unpleasant surprises, individuals feel their self-esteem may be in danger: they felt themselves to be less important and less valuable and lost their confidence. By transforming the situation and/or their interpretation of their situation, their goal was to reaffirm their own self-esteem and their positive self-image. Cases involving pleasant surprises are similar as far as the interpretation of the situation is concerned: individuals tended to use their interpretation to reinforce their self-confidence and positive self-image.

So far, we have not dealt with the role of significance, although it is similarly critical and is, like self-esteem, generalizable for all. The mechanism-category purpose shows that work may acquire a sense of significance simply by having a purpose (Rosso et al., 2010). Among philosophers, it was primarily Frankl (1988/1946) who emphasized the significance of purpose in the life of the individual: in Frankl's view, no human being could survive for long without goals – goals are simply that fundamental. Researchers differentiate among a broad spectrum of goals: from intrinsic goals and motivations all the way to extrinsic or spiritually motivated goals (Rosso et al., 2010). In the cases examined, we saw that each individual had some distinct purpose which they were hoping to reach and experience. This,

essentially, provided the primary meaningfulness of work. Each of these goals is, in actuality, related to a specific mechanism. For Rita, the meaningfulness of work was provided primarily by amicable personal relations (interpersonal connectedness mechanism); for Melinda, this was coping with difficult tasks, proving herself and succeeding (competence-proving mechanism); for Léna, it was helping and serving others (perceived impact – service mechanism). We were able to identify similarly fundamental goals for each individual. We also saw that surprising situations, for the most part, posed a threat to experiencing these goals. That is why individuals strove to create a situation that is more favorable to them and that would allow them to experience their purpose, by formulating a new, different interpretation and then working to realize it through their actions. When their own personal purpose was irreconcilable with that of the organization, they left their workplace.

We encountered two examples where the individual experienced such far-reaching changes in their lives that it changed their fundamental goals. In the case of Rita (case 1), her desire at amicable personal relationships (interpersonal connectedness mechanism) was replaced by a desire at recognition (self-esteem mechanism). In the case of Melinda (case 3), coping with difficult tasks, proving herself and succeeding (competence-proving mechanism) was replaced by the desire for realistic requirements and realistic tasks (control-autonomy mechanism). As a general pattern we saw that cases where lasting changes were processed, the fundamental purpose became more important and valued: this was the case with Bence1, Léna2, Balázs2 and Bence2 (as well as all cases indicated by an upward-pointing arrow in the Significance column of the figure, apart from the cases of Rita1 and Melinda3). We also encountered examples where the case and the change did not have to do with the meaningfulness of work or their fundamental purpose: this was the case with Léna1, Melinda2 and Viktor2 (no arrow is shown in their case in the Significance column of the figure). Viktor's cases are worth examining more closely, however. Essentially, it appears as though Viktor had dual goals: one has to do with a major effect and realizing a significant change, but this was met with failure. This is shown in the case Viktor1 and is connected to the perceived impact-career mechanism. The other purpose has to do with personal development, which is a new purpose for him (he participated in a leadership training course just prior to our interview and formulated this purpose for himself there); this is shown in the case Viktor2, and is connected to the perceived impact-service mechanism. Both goals operate in parallel: the development purpose was announced within the organization, and he proved successful in its realization. This was reinforcing in nature to him. His purpose of realizing major changes was not announced, it was accompanied by failures, and this filled him with uncertainty and tension. If we compare these two goals: the purpose at realizing changes loses some of its significance, but is still more important than the development purpose. This was reinforced by the fact that Viktor stated, in connection with development, that he creates value for others – he does not say that this is what lends meaningfulness to his work. Viktor's cases depict a transitionary phase of changing fundamental goals: a point where no change has yet taken place. They also show, however, that each individual may only have one fundamental purpose. This is further confirmed by the cases of Melinda3 and Rita1, where they describe changes to their fundamental goals.

We also see an example of a mechanism which thus far had not been included in the literature, and have two cases to support its significance. This new mechanism is striving for financial security. The literature (Rosso et al., 2010) defines mechanisms through which the sources of the meaning and significance of work influence the meaning and meaningfulness of work. We see from the two cases that if striving for financial security becomes important or, alternatively, becomes less important, the work of the individual acquires new meaning and a new meaningfulness. We see examples supporting both options in the cases examined. The case of Norbert (Norbert2) shows that the meaning of work changes when the individual feels threatened in their workplace. Work is transformed into a workplace to hold on to and the guarantor of the individual's livelihood and financial security. The case of Melinda (Melinda2) depicts a situation where the individual's desire for financial security decreases: instead of financial security provided by her job, Melinda chooses a type of "psychological security." She herself wants control to ensure that she does not end up in a situation that would be humanly unacceptable for her. This is signaled by an increase in the control-autonomy mechanism. If we examine striving for financial security – as a new mechanism – we see that it is unable to fulfill the role of the fundamental purpose of work: it is unable to imbue work with meaningfulness. If this is the criteria we choose to focus on, striving for financial security cannot fill this role. At the same time, the examples above show that work acquires a new meaning through the process of striving for security. Thus, if we take a broader approach to mechanisms – as a meaning of work – then striving for financial security may also be considered a mechanism.

At this point, it is worthwhile to return to the differences in definition, and distinctions, between the meaning and meaningfulness of work. This is often ignored by the literature (Rosso et al., 2010; Wrzesniewski, 2010). Through an understanding of the individual's fundamental goals within their work, and of the significance of work, the two processes are easy to separate. We saw, in the cases examined, that each individual had some kind of principal purpose which they were hoping to experience and which lent a meaningfulness to their work. Based on my research, we are able to formulate the following, more precise, definition of the meaningfulness of work. **The individual experiences the meaningfulness of work primarily through the fundamental purposes of their work, through the significance of their work – this is what the individual strives to experience through their work.** This definition is worth expanding upon based on my research.

- (1) **Fundamental purpose.** The individual may have several goals with their work, but only one fundamental purpose, and they work primarily to experience this one. Thus, there is a kind of priority order among the individual's goals. Examples of these include the cases of Viktor, which depicted a transitionary period in the change of the fundamental purpose; the cases of Melinda which depict a change in the meaningfulness of work and incorporate a shift in priorities between work and other components of her life; and the case of Rita1, which describes a change of her fundamental purpose. This statement also means that the same purpose may carry great significance for one person, but may not be priority number one for another individual. Fundamental goals, thus, differ from person to person.

- (2) **Social impact**. Although this is not included in the definition, the cases still show that the meaningfulness of work may change depending on the individual's social environment and the social impacts they encounter. The cases of Melinda and Rita serve to underscore this.
- (3) **The importance of the purpose**. The purpose is so critical for the individual, that they would be willing to take on serious risks to experience the purpose or if they encounter serious difficulties meeting that purpose. Its significance is reflected in the fact that if the individual is unable to realize that purpose, they may experience frustrations or even illness. This is in keeping with Frankl's (1988/1946) statements regarding the importance of the purpose.
- (4) **The purpose as a process and an experience**. The purpose may, fundamentally, be linked to a specific mechanism in the sense that this is not something to reach or be reached – it is to be experienced, is an experience and is a process.
- (5) **The difference between meaningfulness and meaning**. It follows from the definition that if something is not a fundamental purpose, but is important for the individual, it impacts not the meaningfulness of their work, but its meaning. In other words, the meaning of work can be every additional purpose or mechanism, or content expressing the work, which is not the individual's fundamental purpose. Thus, the relationship, formulated at the beginning of the dissertation, between meaning and meaningfulness is valid: "meaningfulness is narrower in scope than meaning: everything has a meaning, but not everything has a meaningfulness."
- (6) **Enactment**. In the definition above, the phrase "what the individual strives to experience through their work" denotes that if the individual encounters any kind of obstacle when trying to experience their purpose, they will strive to create a situation more favorable for themselves – and to facilitate the experiencing of their purpose – by formulating a new interpretation and taking action to realize this. The action taken to realize the new interpretation is in harmony with enactment, a characteristic of sensemaking (Weick, 1995). The concept of enactment emphasizes that individuals are able to influence their surroundings. I.e. they define a new role for themselves and proceed to realize it (cases of Léna1 and Melinda1), or they change their roles (cases of Léna2, Bence1) – either within the same environment or under new conditions. As we saw in the cases of Norbert, it is also possible that the individual may experience significant tension if realizing their own goals and vision is met with obstacles.
- (7) **Perceived phenomenon**. In the definition above, the phrase "what the individual strives to experience through their work" indicates that it is a subject of the individual's perceptions how they experience the purpose through their work. The meaningfulness of work denotes the extent of the perceived sense of work – i.e. the extent to which the individual is able to experience the meaningfulness, the fundamental goals of their work in their work.

If we examine the literature dealing with the meaningfulness and meaning of work, we see that researchers confuse, or at least do not treat separately, the concepts of the meaningfulness and meaning of work (Rosso et al., 2010; Wrzesniewski, 2010). The distinctions in the definition used above (item no. 5) between the meaning and meaningfulness of work is in harmony with the definitions used by Rosso et al. (2010), Wrzesniewski (2010) and Pratt–Ashforth (2003). The concept of subjective perception, and the social determination of perception, emphasized in the definition and in the

explanation are in harmony with the model of job crafting (Wrzesniewski – Dutton, 2001) and with the interpersonal sensemaking model of work meaning (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003) – and with the model of identity based model of work meaningfulness (Pratt–Ashforth, 2003). At the same time, in addition to fundamental differences – as shown above –, it has become possible to provide an additional, more exact definition of the meaning of work. This represents a new topic in the literature, that I will be expanding upon in the concluding chapter.

III.2.3. Frameworks of the Meaning of Work: The Model of Meaning of Work Schemas

Following the summary, let us return to one of the fundamental conceptual frameworks of my dissertation – schemas, with a necessary focus on theoretical generalizability (Maxwell, 1996). As mentioned in the preceding chapter, we are able to differentiate between changes of various magnitude: the task-job-role-profession-life-domain represent an ever-increasing rethinking and ever-greater changes in the life of the individual. The various categories of reinterpreting the situation may essentially be understood as different perceptional and interpretational frameworks of the meaning of work, i.e. as different schemas of the meaning of work. If we look at our definition of the process of sensemaking: it stated that we are placing social stimuli in existing or emerging cognitive frameworks, it alludes to the existence or change of the perceptional and interpretational framework.

The model summarizes what perceptional and interpretational frameworks the meaning of work affects. In other words: what cognitive frameworks and categories the individual considers when thinking about the meaning of work. Is it the individual's task, job, role, profession, a part of their life, workplace relationship, their relationship to the organization and the individual in their work. Thus, **work, as a perceptional and interpretational framework is made up of several closely interlinked perceptional and interpretive frameworks** – the meaning of the totality of all of these creates the meaning of work.

The model of the meaning of work schemas confirms that it is possible to identify a certain **hierarchical structure** among the various perceptional and interpretational frameworks comprising the meaning of work. Together with the reinterpreting of the job, the individual also reinterprets their tasks: Csilla (case 1) transforms her tasks according to the new situation and agrees to take on the fight. Reinterpreting the role also includes having the individual say no to their current job, tasks and/or relationships or seek out or take on a new role: e.g. take on a management job vs. a specialist job (case of Rita 1) or take on a specialist positions vs. a management job (case of Léna 1), or seek out a job which does not entail tasks they find undesirable (case of Melinda1). Reinterpreting the individual's relationship to their profession includes having the individual change their understanding of their current profession: they may choose a new profession in the place of their current one and may rethink their role, job and tasks (case of Melinda 2) or may become committed to their current profession (HR), role, job or tasks (cases of Mihály 1 and 2). Reinterpreting work as a life-domain includes having the individual change their

fundamental understanding of the role their work plays in their life, as well as of their profession, their role within the organization, their job and their tasks (Melinda 3).

Based on the process, we can see that reinterpreting the situation is primarily affected by **relationships with managers and coworkers**, and how the individual makes sense of the situation depends on their own thought processes and interpretations. Social relationships are the instigators of the change, but are also affected by the change: as a result of an unexpected event, the individual may reinterpret their social relationships when reinterpreting the meaning of their work.

The temporary and unstable change of work meaning may be considered the **first-order change** of work meaning schemas; one unique feature is that following the change, the schemas may carry internal contradictions (Fiske – Taylor, 1991; George – Jones, 2001). In the case of the lasting and stable change of work meaning, the fundamental character of the meaning of work schemas is called into question. This may be referred to as **second-order change**, when the individual must reframe (Bartunek, 1988; George – Jones, 2001) their expectations and their view of the world. In terms of the change of the meaning of work, the second-order change is different from the first-order change in that the individual's work identity changes, and similarly their interpretation of their own role also changes.

The figure describing the model shows what elements of the meaning of work change as a result of the change. Based on my research findings, a lasting change of work meaning occurred in fourteen cases, involving durable changes to the individual's mechanisms, orientation, beliefs and sets of values. In these cases, the individual's self-understanding also changed, and as a result, so did their understanding of their role. In some cases, the change covered the individual's profession or work as a part of their life. These are indicated in the figure using darker colors. As a result of the hierarchical structure, we also know that if the individual changed their understanding of their role, this is accompanied by a reinterpretation of their job or tasks. Based on my research, it is not possible to draw clear conclusions on the change in meaning of social relationships: in the majority of cases involving lasting changes, individuals reinterpreted their relationships with coworkers or their managers. In some cases – but not in all – this change was accompanied by a reinterpretation of the individual's relationship with the organization. The model also calls attention to the fact that a lasting change in the meaning of work occurred if there was a change to the individual's beliefs about themselves and their roles.

Figure 1: The model of meaning of work schemas (author's own data)
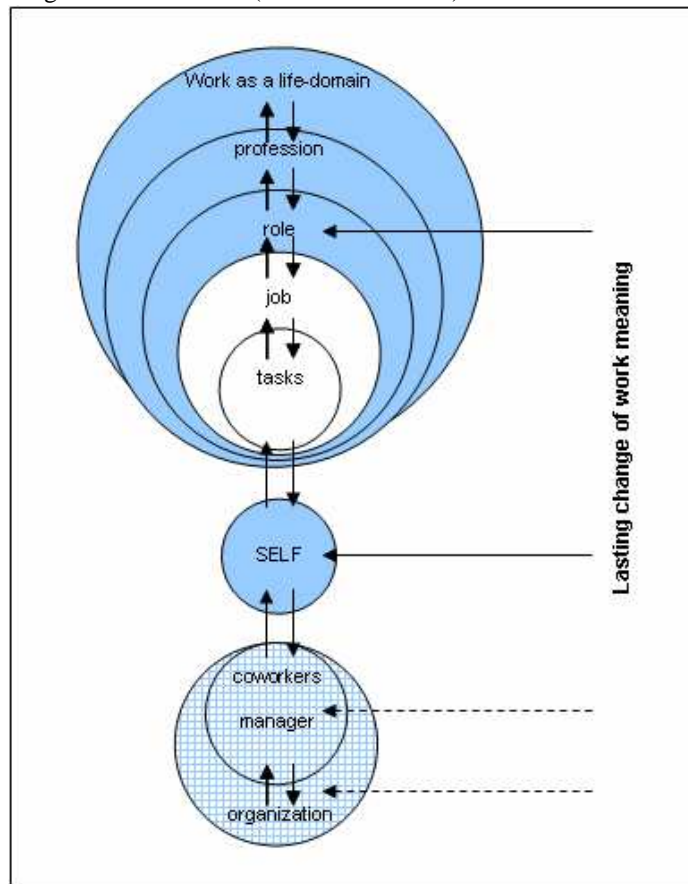
It is worthwhile to review the literature when examining the concept of the meaning of work schema. In their manuscript, Lepisto et al. point out (p. 12) that the literature is not consistent in terms of the **level of abstraction of the concept of work**. There are interpretations where work is seen as a task, a job or a profession; the authors cite several examples of each approach. Some researchers defined work on the level of tasks: "tasks represent the most basic building blocks of the relationship between employees and the organization" (Griffin, 1987:94 in Lepisto et al., manuscript). Others defined work on the level of the job: "a set of task elements grouped together" (Ilgen – Hollenbeck, 1992: 173 in Lepisto et al., manuscript) or "work tasks and interactions" (Wrzesniewski – Dutton, 2001:179). Citing models and approaches, the model of job enrichment defined work on the level of the job (Hackman – Oldham, 1976), as well as in the model of job crafting (Wrzesniewski – Dutton, 2001; Berg et al., 2010). Other researchers approached the issue from the level of the profession, which they viewed as types of jobs (Abbott, 1989 in Lepisto et al., manuscript). In the "Meaning of Work" (MOW) project, examining the centrality and central role of work, work was interpreted more abstractly, using the following definition: "the degree of general importance that working has in the life of an individual" (Quintanilla, 1991:85). Similarly, a more general interpretation of work was used in research covering work orientation, relying

on the following definition of orientation: "beliefs about the activity of work in general" (Rosso et al.:98). Lepisto et al. (manuscript) pointed out that these latter two approaches consider work on a more general and abstract level, and not on the level of a task, job or profession. The authors refer to this more general level as work as a life-domain, similar to leisure time, studying or family.

The results of my research add further detail to the question of the **abstraction level of work**, and add additional content to this approach in two areas. Firstly, the case studies add to the interpretation levels of work: the level of task-job-profession-life-domain is joined by an additional level, that of the role. Secondly, these levels may be divided into two broader, closely linked groups: the task-job group and the role-profession-life-domain group. The change of the interpretation of role-profession-life-domain may bring change to the meaning of work and the orientation of work; the change of the interpretation of the task-job does not change the meaning of work, except in cases where it is accompanied by the changing of the role as well. Based on research results, we may be able to draw the conclusion that the self-image of the individual, their work identities and roles is closely interconnected. This conclusion is in harmony with what is stated in the interpersonal sensemaking model of work meaning: in it, authors point to the fact that the meaning of job, role and the meaning of self are closely linked and affect one another (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003) and jointly affect the meaning of the work of the individual.

At this point, it is worthwhile to return to the concept of **work orientation,** which Pratt et al. (forthcoming) and Lepisto et al. (manuscript) linked to the purpose of the individual as far as work, as a life-domain, is concerned. Based on my findings, we may conclude that the purpose of work as life-domain is too high-level in nature: even less radical, but comprehensive changes led to changes in work orientation and the meaning of work. We have several cases to illustrate this (e.g. the cases of Bence, Léna, Mihály and Csilla). Based on the above, we see that orientation is not on the level of life-domain goals, but on the level of roles. This aligns with the authors' definition of work orientation insofar as orientation being considered a disposition. My own research underpins the relative permanence of work orientation among the individuals: I saw that parallel with the changes in work orientation, the beliefs and values of the individual also changed. In light of my research findings, it is worth examining the definition of work orientation as proposed by Rosso et al. (2010:98): "beliefs about the activity of work in general." The authors treat this separately from beliefs related to specific work. It is necessary to add to this definition, based on the model, that these beliefs pertain to the following aspects: role, profession, work as a life-domain and the self at work.

In our comparison of the literature, it is important to cover the model of job crafting (Wrzesniewski – Dutton, 2001). As a result of the crafting of the job, the authors believe the work identity of the individual (how the individuals define themselves in the course of their work) also changes, as does the meaning of work as defined based on the definition provided in the comprehensive review published by Brief and Nord (1990b). The meaning of work (Wrzesniewski – Dutton, 2001: 180): "individuals' understandings of the purpose of their work or what they believe is achieved in their work." The conclusions of my own research both support this definition, but also differ from it. As a common element, we may state that for lasting change to occur, it is necessary for the individual's self-definition and beliefs about themselves to change. The difference is that in the definition formulated by Brief and

Nord (1990b) does not precisely explain the "individuals' understandings of the purpose of their work" and what exactly the authors mean by "what they believe is achieved in their work." This may pertain to goals having to do with task, job, role, profession or life-domain – i.e. it can apply to the fundamental goals (significance) behind the individual's work, since all of these can be said to be the goals of their work or what they wish to reach through their work. In the cases examined, we saw that each subject had some kind of priority purpose which they strove to achieve – this served as the primary purpose of their work. Based on the research, we see that lasting change also came about when the fundamental purpose of the individual did not undergo a quality change: e.g. the cases of Bence, Csilla2, Csilla3, Melinda1, Melinda2 and Léna. It is possible that Brief and Nord, as well as Wrzesniewski and Dutton, did not look to define the purpose on this level. Based on the meaning of work schema, I propose the following new definition: the individual's understanding of the purpose of their work, or what they believe they can achieve through their work; this purpose may be related to their tasks, their job, their role within the organization, their profession or the role their work plays in their lives. The meaning of work may undergo lasting change if the work identity of the individual changes, or if the purpose related to the role of the individual in the organization and/or their profession and/or the role their work plays in their life changes.

IV. Summarizing the Results of the Research

In this chapter, I will plot the results of my own research on the map of the literature dealing with the meaning of work, and I will point out where it contributes to the professional discourse through new or novel results.

To date, no researcher has applied the **analysis of critical incidents** when studying the meaning and meaningfulness of work; this is thus a new approach. Through the examination of critical events, I was able to highlight several unique characteristics of the meaningfulness and meaning of work, and of the change of work meaning, which no other study had managed to identify before.

Individuals encountered critical incidents in the social environment of their workplaces – i.e. each event was initiated by the manager of the organization, a direct supervisor or coworkers. Thus, based on the research, we are able to state that coworkers and the **individual's social environment in the workplace affect the meaning and meaningfulness of the individual's work**. These may transform the meaning of the individual's work, including their work orientation and its mechanisms. In fact, we may go further to state that the individual – as a result of their coworkers and their social environment – changes how they perceive their tasks, job, coworkers, managers, organization, role, profession and the role their job plays in their life. As a result, they may change any of these and could even change professions or lifestyles. Literature dealing with the meaning of work has not examined similar results of the role the individual's social environment in the workplace.

The definition of the **meaningfulness of work** – expounded and expanded based on my research – covered the difference between the meaning and meaningfulness of work, which matches the definitions used by van Rosso et al. (2010), Wrzesniewski (2010) and Pratt – Ashforth (2003). The definition highlights several unique characteristics of the meaningfulness of work which have not been discussed in the past. The research also points to another a novel notion by pointing out that the individual has a primary purpose which they seek to experience and for which they are willing to take even serious risks. I believe that this result, supported by further research, could provide new insight into our understanding of the meaningfulness of work.

Through the examination of the process of sensemaking, I arrived at the **model of meaning of work schemas**, thereby bringing a new perspective to the series of studies examining the meaning of work. I pointed out that the various frames of the perception and interpretation of work are inseparable from the meaning of work. Based on this, it seemed necessary to add to and detail the concept of orientation and the broader notion of work meaning as they are used in the literature.

Studies examining **work orientation** allowed for the possibility of the change of orientation, but did not however cover an examination of the **nature of this change**; i.e. this is a new topic in the literature.

Examining the mechanisms is new in the body of literature. Following the formulation of the concept of mechanisms, no research was conducted, to date, in this framework. Among the mechanisms, I was able to identify – in addition to **lasting changes – temporary, unstable changes** affecting the meaning of work. I also found an example of a **mechanism** which has not yet been discussed in the literature, yet whose significance is supported by two cases. The examination of changes to mechanisms and orientations in my research made it possible to explore both the examination of interaction between **orientations** as well as mechanisms, and links between these; this is new in the literature as well. Based on my findings, **self-esteem** pays a key role among the mechanisms; **significance** also plays an important role, which also changes together with several other mechanisms.

The research methodology employed and the results discovered will be easy to use by HR specialists and coaches. **Practicing specialists** may contribute, using the findings of this study, new perspectives to support their colleagues to shape their work more meaningful. The results of the study and the methodology employed may also be used to revisit corporate practices: companies may better retain their employees if they explore what it is that key employees (or all employees) believe is the meaningfulness of their work. By doing so, the company can implement appropriate measures and actions in their HR practices.

V. References

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