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Meaningful Interventions

Meaningful interventions assume that people who talk and work with each other give meaning together to the reality in which they live. Proceeding from those pictures of reality, people take the initiative to have meaning. Meaningful interventions aim at organizing meetings at which people search for the meaning of their work, the meaning of working together and the meaning of the company they work for. Nine interventions are discussed in this chapter. The first three interventions involve the use of core values, symbols and artefacts to give people something to go by in their actions. The next four interventions use images and stories to gain a view of a desirable future and focus on the importance of sense-making, language and communication. Language is important for making space for change. The meaning of events can change because people communicate in many ways, introduce new concepts, make it possible to discuss obstacles and use humour. This creates mental space for looking at things differently and acting differently. The final two interventions latch on to professional knowledge and professional pride. From that professional knowledge and pride, people take the initiative to experiment with renewal and have meaning for others.

Expressing Core Values

Unique uses the "mentality match" for visualizing the lifestyle and underlying values and standards of people. Unique uses this instrument so it can place temporary workers better and as a tool for team development for its own employees. It turns out that the employees have many similarities in their living environment: they know what they want, they have style, enjoy freedom, feel involved with the environment and go for quality. Unique relates these lifestyles of its employees with the strategy of the company and formulates five core values: energy, autonomy, indulgence, pluck and commitment. These core values are visualized in beautiful pictures that are about them. Unique also uses the core values and the pictures in its communication strategy and conceptualization to the outside world. Because the lifestyle groups place great store by aesthetics, the core values are represented in a collage style with multicoloured graphic elements. The pictures are broadly implemented in the communication strategy, from office furnishing to business cards.

Formulating core values gives direction to behaviour. Many companies in this book work with core values that match the desired culture of the organization. The core values gain more value if they are also represented in symbols. Symbols appeal to the right half of the brain where creativity and emotion are localized. Linking words with pictures helps the core values to stick better. The images invite people to talk about the pictures and their meaning. The pictures make it possible to choose the affinity with core values in a team on the basis of feeling and not only as a rational choice. This makes it possible to discuss differences. The representation also widens the perspective to the sensory and physical elements of organizational life.[1] Using art does not automatically evoke an aesthetic experience. You need a willing observer for that. Discussing pictures can contribute to values being shared. One drawback can be that people can find out that they share relatively few values with others in the organization. This can result in exclusion or departure.

There are a few handholds to expressing core values:

- The number of core values is restricted and amounts to no more than seven visualized values.

- The pictures form a single whole as far as style and feeling are concerned and have aesthetics that touch on perceptions and the relationships that people enter into with others and with things.
- The pictures affect deeper layers of emotion and can be explained in multiple ways, so that people can exchange meanings.
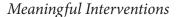
Visualizing Symbols

> When Heidemij changes its name to Arcadis, the organization also chooses a new logo. Market analysis has shown that competitors all have technical logos with blue arrows and diagrams. "Because we want to be a distinctive company, we chose an emotional logo that hits people in the heart. We chose the salamander. That salamander lives in the border region between water and land: where we do our business. The salamander is highly sensitive to disturbances to the natural environment. Everywhere you find the salamander you can be sure that the environment is healthy and safe: we work for a healthy and safe living environment. So you see that meaning back in our logo too." It is interesting that Arcadis chose the colour orange for its stylized salamander. This colour has a warm tone and is quite different to the logos of the competitors.
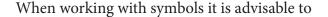
Symbols are a strong form of expression of the identity and business idea of an organization. A symbol allows you to tell a story about the company and what the company stands by on a social level. The story based on symbols can be transmitted easily and thus finds its own way, as it were. Symbols can contribute to pride, to identification with a company and to a feeling of unity. Symbols can also confirm the core values. Symbols refer to invisible but important things such as thoughts, ideas, feelings and emotions.[2] Symbols give meaning to what is happening and influence how people regard reality.[3] Symbols play a part in giving meaning and in the stories there are to tell about a company. Symbols can be interpreted in more than one way and some employees or customers can reject them. That is why it is essential for an organization to choose the symbol after careful consideration and to tell a story with the symbol that reinforces the identity and core values of that company.

When working with symbols it is advisable to

- choose symbols with a story attached that touches on the meaning and values of the company,
- take into account symbols that were meaningful in the past and to which people attach meanings that affect the identity of the organization and
- be careful with symbols that involve religion, archetypes or cultural rituals.

Fancying Artefacts

The medical director at Quadrant acknowledges the necessity of working according to customer wishes and acknowledges that the new method of working creates uncertainty. In order to flesh out the new method of working, in his free time he knocks together a ladder that symbolizes the new method of working. The ladder helps to distinguish the different levels from which professionals can talk about their work and act. Each rung of the ladder represents a different level. The first rung is the vision from which someone looks at his work. The second one is about the goal of the work. The third rung concerns the method of working. After that it involves the structure of the work, one's own professional domain and only on the top rung are the personal motives concerned. The handrails represent the culture and the systems in the organization. This metaphor helps the supervisors to investigate how incidents arose in the old method of working. The ladder is in his office and helps provide language for the new way of working according to customer wishes. The ladder is also printed on a placemat and distributed through the organization as a thought model. This gives the cultural change anchoring points and stimulates the employees to give substance to working according to customer wishes.

Artefacts are the most visible aspect of a culture. They are instructions for behaviour that are expressed in words and images. Artefacts are made by people and give information about the culture of the maker and the users. Artefacts help in the communication and give direction to behavior.[4] In the example, the ladder gives symbolic instructions for a new method of working. The ladder makes communicating about the work easier. One danger in using artefacts is that the cultural change goes no further than the formulation of

rules of conduct and the translation of good intentions in posters, cartoons, desk clocks with texts and other trinkets. The cultural change ends up getting stuck in superficial changes that rarely have an impact and are not durable.

Artefacts are mainly effective if

- they are made by people who are at work themselves and want to anchor their work methodically in language and image,
- language and image are linked in the meaning that the artefact gives to the day-to-day work and
- managers use them in discussions about working methods and if employees use them in discussions about the day-to-day work.
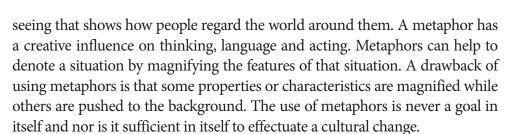
Imagining Futures

During informal meetings of the managers of Professional Services at Albert Heijn, the managers see that renewal is needed so Albert Heijn can take the next step towards Europe. They adopt the metaphor of a large supply ship that enables the professionals from Finance, Information Management and Human Resources to keep a fleet of speed boats (chain stores) sailing fast and manoeuvrable. After all, the consumer behaves increasingly erratically in how he buys foods and other items. The metaphor ties in with an earlier metaphor of "getting the ship afloat" from the time that Ahold was balancing on the edge of liquidation. These images inspire a manager in Finance to depict the new working method of Finance in the drawing of a ship that shows the ambitions of Finance as spotting developments from the crow's nest, registration of how things are from the wheel house, advice where necessary by coming alongside and adjusting the course when desirable by using the compass. This picture leads to an in-depth discussion about the role of Finance and a picture for the future development for the department.

Imagining the future is a tool to open up discussion about the meaning of that future and what the difference is between the old methods of working and culture and the new ones. The most powerful are drawings made by people themselves that show a movement from an old situation towards a new situation. This concerns metaphorical images with which situations about changes can be understood. A metaphor is often used to liven up a discussion, but its meaning is far greater.[5] Using a metaphor touches on a way of thinking and a way of

seeing that shows how people regard the world around them. A metaphor has a creative influence on thinking, language and acting. Metaphors can help to denote a situation by magnifying the features of that situation. A drawback of using metaphors is that some properties or characteristics are magnified while others are pushed to the background. The use of metaphors is never a goal in itself and nor is it sufficient in itself to effectuate a cultural change.

Metaphors can contribute to a desired picture of the future if

- the metaphor is expressive and challenging, magnifies the features of the desired situation and invites discussion,
- the metaphor is made by people who are positioned in the work (using different metaphors makes it possible to look at situations in various ways and a story can be made from the old situation to the new one) and
- formulating or making metaphors together contributes to a process of exchange about the meaning of the enterprise.

Storytelling and Sense-Making

There are many stories about 3M: how the company started as the Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Co. and failed to sell a mineral deposit for grinding wheel abrasives and the invention of waterproof sandpaper, which reduced airborne dust during automobile manufacturing. One famous story is about one of the scientists who, while singing in a choir, wished he had bookmarks that would not fall out of the hymnal and later created Post-it notes.[6] Stories are a habit of mind at 3M. It is central to the identity of the company and it is part of the way people at 3M see themselves and each other. It gives meaning to the business operations, creates an innovative environment and offers possibilities to discover opportunities for strategic change. This is one of the stories about the innovative power of 3M: From its early days, 3M fostered a culture of innovation in its organization. McKnight, one of the first presidents of 3M encouraged management to "delegate responsibility and encourage men and women to exercise their initiative." His management theories are still the guiding principles for 3M. His basic rule of management was laid out in 1948:

"As our business grows, it becomes increasingly necessary to delegate responsibility and to encourage men and women to exercise

their initiative. This requires considerable tolerance. Those men and women, to whom we delegate authority and responsibility, if they are good people, are going to want to do their jobs in their own way. Mistakes will be made. But if a person is essentially right, the mistakes he or she makes are not as serious in the long run as the mistakes management will make if it undertakes to tell those in authority exactly how they must do their jobs. Management that is destructively critical when mistakes are made kills initiative. And it's essential that we have many people with initiative if we are to continue to grow."

His principles for fostering an innovative culture were summarized in six principles:

- Listen to everyone with an original idea, no matter how absurd it might sound first;
- Encourage; do not nitpick. Let people run with an idea;
- Hire good people and leave them alone;
- If you put fences around people, you get sheep. Give people the room they need;
- Encourage experimental doodling and
- Give it a try – and quick.

Interesting enough, these principles are born from practice and reflection. A young lab assistant, Drew, took waterproof sandpaper to garages for product testing. During his visits to the garages, he noticed that painters faced a problem when painting cars: either the paint came off when the tape protecting a portion of the car was removed or the tape's adhesive remained on the car surface. Drew started experimenting to produce an adhesive that would not stick on the cars and would not peel off the paint. However, after months of experimentation, his efforts were not successful and McKnight asked Drew to abandon his research and resume his official duties. In spite of McKnight's orders, Drew continued his research and eventually developed Scotch masking tape. The incident resulted in the famous 15% rule at 3M. According to the 15% rule, employees were allowed to spend 15% of their working hours on independent projects. Nowadays managers and professionals use strategic narratives in their planning processes not only to clarify thinking behind their plans but also to capture the imagination and the excitement of other people in the organization.

Telling stories is a powerful intervention for giving meaning and clarifying the direction of the change.[7] Stories also serve a preserving function in the changing of a culture. Stories celebrate the successes but also the setbacks of an organization, honour the heroes and anti-heroes and pass on the backgrounds of all kinds of behaviour. People learn from stories what the situation of the organization is, what the standards and values are and how they are expected to behave. A story can also stimulate the power of imagination to gain sight of the things people yearn for and what they see in store.[8] Telling a story requires a storyteller and an audience. The interactions between storyteller and listeners create a space within which they exchange ideas, experiences, feelings and other mental content. Telling and exchanging stories thus touches hidden assumptions of people in organizations. The story aims not only at the past but also at a possible future. With cultural change, the skill is in storytelling the future. Stories can also boost a cultural change that is already underway and serve as an example and inspiration if they are about successful actions and successes. The listener looks for a meaning in the story. Metaphors in stories can get people thinking and give instructions for a change direction. Using stories in a change process can help to develop a vision of the future and contribute to sense-making and application in your own organization. The intervention is also suitable for outlining an inspiring picture for the future and saying farewell to old stories and uses. If people who are involved exchange stories, insight into each other's perspectives and perceptions arises. The stories enable them to bring pictures of reality together. This intervention is not suitable if existing stories are cherished that have a preserving effect and cannot be used for solving conflicts between groups.

Some tips for telling stories.[9]

- Use expressive language, for instance in the form of a metaphor, a simile or a parable.
- Use recurrent patterns and archetypical elements that touch on deeper experiences and emotions.
- Switch perspective regularly, for example, between the main character and other actors.
- Let the players in the story literally speak and think out loud. Make their experience and deliberations visible.
- Every so often digress and possibly weave commentary in from the sidelines.

- Work with several layers of meaning that can make connections in different ways to fundamental values and opinions.
- Take care that there is a good ending or an open end so that the message offers the possibility of identification, makes a depth impact and fixes itself in people's minds.
- Make connections between the story and the day-to-day events in the company or the department, but do not explain the story.

Introducing New Language

3M introduces new language and words to give meaning to specific actions and support innovative behaviours. Based on their official vision statement to be the most innovative enterprise in the world, they coined the word "inventorpreneur" for those who invent and implement. The word reflects what is appreciated: new ideas and implementation which result in improvement, gain and profit.
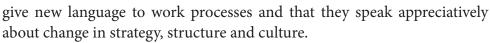
The word encourages stubborn persistence amongst employees to accept and promote their ideas.

Another uncommon word in business environments is the word "bootlegging." This word reflects the principle that any employee is allowed to use 15% of their working day to concentrate on their own ideas. To keep a cage on this principle 3M introduced a "trial & fire" philosophy and encouraged all ideas to be viewed from a "do or die" perspective by a team of managers and inventorpreneurs. Another word reflecting the innovative culture is "structured serendipity," whereby managers foster and promote the circulation of ideas throughout the company, all across the world. The innovative culture is nurtured by stories and myths about 3M "inventorpreneurs" and the practice of "bootlegging."

Language is rooted in day-to-day practice. People often use abstract concepts to interpret difficult issues in organizations. Using language provides insight into individuals' perceptions of their environment. Implicit rules of conduct for specific situations arise from the meaning of the language. New language assigns different meanings to events and puts existing meanings under pressure. The use of new language can help create an open climate with new windows on change.[14] Little research has been done into the use of language in cultural change. This book shows that people often

give new language to work processes and that they speak appreciatively about change in strategy, structure and culture.

Introducing new language can make space for renewal if

- new words do not yet have a meaning, have a neutral meaning or even a positive and inviting connotation and
- the new language makes different work practices possible and gives them meaning with different words.

Communication All Round

The board of Unique invests in the relationship with the people in the branch offices to realize Unique's new strategy. The board chooses a multitude of communication channels. The director can be reached by email and during telephone consultation hours. There is a conference call two times a month with all branch managers. Board members regularly work with employees at a branch or are present at lunches. The board collects comments from the employee satisfaction survey and makes these comments the subject of discussion. Lunches are organized between a board member and small groups of branch managers. Branch managers and customers can meet each other at away days to talk with each other and the board about the strategy and the operating results. Employees are invited to participate in workgroups and help think about the new strategy. The direct communication is supported by bulletins, posters with the vision, images of the core values and even a cake on which the entire vision is copied out. Unique learned how important it is to remain in discussion and provide insight into what they do with the ideas and suggestions from the contacts. This gives employees the feeling that the communication is sincere and has added value. Continuous communication as a two-sided process arises, with different channels and media being used.

Communication during change processes is essential. Leaders in cultural change use language to express the necessity of a change and represent the future. They clarify a vision and a strategic course in understandable and attractive language in order to motivate people for a change. To make it credible, it is advisable for the top managers to be visible in the communication.

Change managers often use written communication such as newsletters, intranet bulletins, the writing of stories, making books, distributing cards with core values or making a new company style. Board members and administrators use video messages, staff sessions, lunch meetings and informal meetings. Communication is not exclusively a unilateral process.[10] Management enters into discussions to make problems and ambitions clear. In the companies studied, people are invited to make their voice heard and they are asked whether they want to think and work together on a change. It is precisely in these interactions that giving meaning takes place and commitment to the change arises. Deep change and cultural formation are only successful if the communication affects the deeper layers of the company identity and people who are involved have the opportunity to exchange meanings.[11] Communicating, organizing and changing are strongly interconnected. People in organizations perform activities, enter into relationships and create a social reality by exchanging meanings. That makes communication an essential activity in cultural change.

Some handholds for effective communication in cultural change:

- For crisis and intermittent change, choose high intensity of information to reduce uncertainty. Be honest in telling what the situation is, what an attainable future looks like and which steps are needed to reach that future.
- For cultural development, choose a two-sided communication process, in which experiences can be exchanged and stories told.
- Make sure that top managers are visible in the bringing of the message and sharing of meanings.
- Pay a lot of attention to informal communication for maintaining the organization as a social identity.
- Use an effective communication mix that uses several means of communication alongside each other.
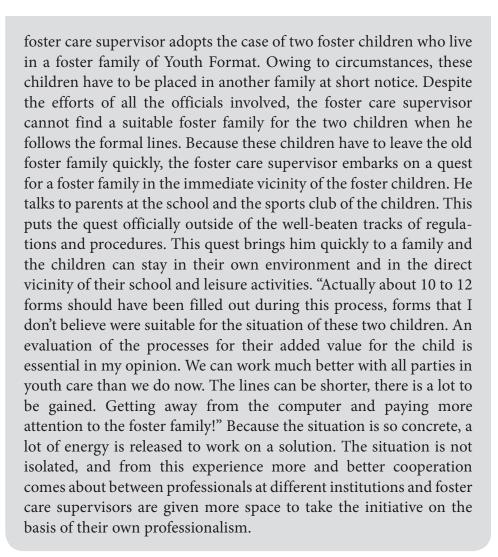
Adopting Cases for Renewal

At Youth Format, employees adopt a specific case that they want to tackle to work on exemplary youth care. Their manager and a member of the board of directors support them in their ambitions to realize innovations. Because this involves real children, the cases are very easy to approach and energy is released to work on them. A

foster care supervisor adopts the case of two foster children who live in a foster family of Youth Format. Owing to circumstances, these children have to be placed in another family at short notice. Despite the efforts of all the officials involved, the foster care supervisor cannot find a suitable foster family for the two children when he follows the formal lines. Because these children have to leave the old foster family quickly, the foster care supervisor embarks on a quest for a foster family in the immediate vicinity of the foster children. He talks to parents at the school and the sports club of the children. This puts the quest officially outside of the well-beaten tracks of regulations and procedures. This quest brings him quickly to a family and the children can stay in their own environment and in the direct vicinity of their school and leisure activities. "Actually about 10 to 12 forms should have been filled out during this process, forms that I don't believe were suitable for the situation of these two children. An evaluation of the processes for their added value for the child is essential in my opinion. We can work much better with all parties in youth care than we do now. The lines can be shorter, there is a lot to be gained. Getting away from the computer and paying more attention to the foster family!" Because the situation is so concrete, a lot of energy is released to work on a solution. The situation is not isolated, and from this experience more and better cooperation comes about between professionals at different institutions and foster care supervisors are given more space to take the initiative on the basis of their own professionalism.

Adopting cases is a powerful intervention method that is based on the skills of professionals. When working on a concrete case, professionals look for meaning in their work, they break through existing patterns and they achieve renewal.[12] Case adoption means professionals take on concrete problems of customers or citizens. The perspective of the customer or the citizen is always the starting point. With the support of a director or sponsor, the professional sets to work on renewal. Case adoption generates energy in professionals who find meaning back in their work. The intervention has a large impact because the perspective of the customer or citizen is placed first and space is created for breakthrough renewal. The results lead to reflection on existing, stifling practices and a reassessment of professional

values. Case adoption results in renewal of working methods, systems and cultures. This intervention is not recommended if directors do not support professionals or if they do not obtain sufficient space to experiment.

Tips for working with case adoption are:

- Always start with the perspective of a customer or citizen and do not adopt a case if there is no direct contact with the end user.
- Use case adoption if problems involve stifling patterns and tensions between professional values and cultural values.
- Only adopt a case if your own organization can work on the solution and on expanding the results.
- Select a case that hits the core of the policy or the essence of the organization and that is supported by a director or sponsor.
- Make sure there is support from others inside and outside your own organization while working on the case and looking for renewal.
- Combine this renewal of working procedures and methods with putting cultural values in the organization up for discussion and renewal.
- Give the end user a role in the assessment and propagation of the results because this contributes to spreading experiences.

Appreciating Professional Knowledge

To realize high quality service, Dutch Railways chooses to appreciate the professional knowledge of its train personnel better. The train drivers and conductors are at the heart of the service to customers and they are a link with the complex logistical process behind the running of trains. They are the ones who notice on every shift that the reality of the schedule regularly differs from the system of logistics experts. A new training centre is built for the train drivers, fitted out with the latest simulation technology. This is the environment in which train drivers meet each other and exchange experiences to improve the service. In the simulation trains, they learn how to work with new equipment and gain experience with unexpected situations that endanger the safety and schedule. The conductors and service employees are made the centre of attention on posters in the campaign "Small effort, big difference." The posters show concrete situations

and real employees who assist travellers. On the one hand, it is about making professional pride visible and recognizing it and on the other hand about encouraging people to be service-minded. Appreciating professional pride contributes to company pride. It also leads to new initiatives, such as the establishment of a Guild of conductors and train drivers which has the ambition of improving the service through craftsmanship and company pride.

Appreciating professional knowledge can be found in many business studies. It is an intervention that provides space to professionals and craftsmen to work on renewal on the basis of their professional pride. Because people can be proud of their profession again, their work gains more meaning.[13] This intervention works well in large companies with a rigid structure and a fossilized organizational culture that squeeze the space of professionals. Giving professionals space allows energy for renewal to come about again as well as space for other values. The intervention is not recommended if professionals put their own interests or comfort first or if there is a conflict between directors, managers and professionals.

Appreciating professional knowledge is an intervention that links the professional values with the social and cultural values of a company. This intervention is effective if

- the social meaning of the enterprise is clear and it is clear what the company stands by and goes for,
- professionals want to contribute to the creation of customer value and the social meaning of the enterprise,
- professionals have knowledge and experience that do not come to full maturity or have been wedged into a corner,
- superiors and managers are prepared to delegate decisions and provide space for professionals in the performance of their work and
- there is mental and physical space to put the professional knowledge to use and there are funds to stimulate the development of professional knowledge.

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